OLD!

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

retro* GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SINCLAIR | NEO-GEO | SONY | COIN-OP | MOBILE

THE NEW LOOK
RETRO GAMER
BACK, BIGGER & BETTER

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?
GHOSTBUSTERS
DAVID CRANE REVEALS HOW TO MAKE A COLOSSAL HIT IN JUST SIX SHORT WEEKS



WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



FORBIDDEN FOREST
SCARING GAMERS WHEN RESIDENT EVIL WAS STILL IN NAPPIES

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK
PITFALL HARRY
SWINGS INTO ACTION FOR AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT ACTIVISION

YOU'RE FIRED!
AMSTRAD CPC 464
HOW ALAN SUGAR'S UNDERDOG MANAGED TO SILENCE THE CYNICS

HI-TECH SOFTWARE
AND YOU THOUGHT OCEAN KNEW HOW TO ABUSE A LICENCE...

BARGAIN HUNT
EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED
WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING

STARFOX 2
ON ARWING AND A PRAYER WITH NINTENDO'S BEST KEPT SECRET

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES
RETURN TO A TIME WHEN COMMODORE AND SINCLAIR RULED THE WORLD

EVERY ISSUE IN RETRO GAMER

RETRO RATED
ALL THE LATEST GAMES TESTED TO THE LIMITS

HOME-BREW
PROJECT PARADROID, COMPETITIONS, EMULATION AND MUCH, MUCH MORE

RETRO REVIVAL
RELIVING THOSE CLASSIC GAMING MOMENTS OF YESTERYEAR

IMAGINE PUBLISHING
Load → 25
£4.99
25
9 771742 315011

eMag

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE EVER FRANCHISE



DAVID CROOKES

Tomb Raider was a startling game, spawning a fantastic sequel – and the lovely Lara – but, just as importantly, helping videogaming on its next step to becoming mainstream. But is it retro?

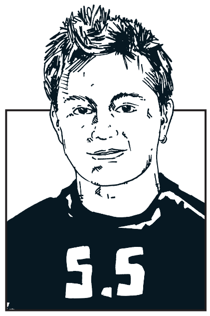
Expertise: All things Amstrad
Currently playing: *Operation Wolf*
Favourite game of all time: *Broken Sword*



ASHLEY DAY

Shining Force! It's the most charismatic, playable and, crucially, fun series of RPGs I've ever played. What a shame that Sega went and ruined the recent PS2 instalments!

Expertise: Games that nobody else seems to like
Currently playing: *Brain Age: Train Your Brain*
Favourite game of all time: *Shining Force III*



SPANNER

As a practicing degenerate thug, the *Renegade* series (including *Double Dragon* and excluding *The Final Chapter*), resonates well with my boorish personality. Got a problem with that?

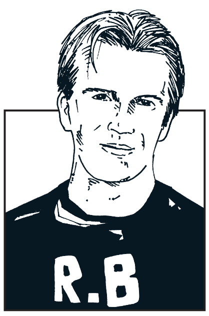
Expertise: Flying head-butt
Currently playing: *Hello Kitty: Roller Rescue*
Favourite game of all time: Football hooliganism



JOHN SZCZEPANIAK

The *Metal Gear* franchise, because despite starting nearly 20 years ago it's always been great fun, while regularly re-inventing itself to stay relevant.

Expertise: Japanese games
Currently playing: *Front Mission: Gun Hazard*
Favourite game of all time: *Cave Story*



RICHARD BURTON

The *Roland* series on the Amstrad. *Roland* changed look almost every game and they were only average titles – but nostalgia pangs forgive all that.

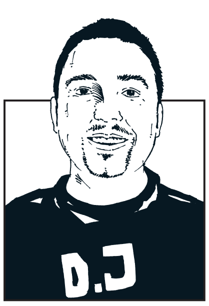
Expertise: Amstrad CPC and Spectrum games
Currently playing: *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast*
Favourite game of all time: *Manic Miner*



MIKE TOOLEY

Panzer Dragoon is my ultimate franchise. To date every game has pushed hardware and imagination. Four games in and we've only seen a glimpse of what the franchise has to offer. Stylistically unchallenged, fully realised in ambition. What next for *PD*?

Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing: *Oblivion*
Favourite game of all time: *Mr Do!*



DARRAN JONES

For me it has to be Konami's *Castlevania* series (2D games only). The franchise really hit its stride with the release of Super Castlevania IV and *Circle Of Blood* and the recent GBA and DS outings were fantastic stuff. The 3D affairs are dead to me though, so don't mention them.

Expertise: You're reading it
Currently playing: *Oblivion*
Favourite game of all time: *Robotron: 2084*



CRAIG GRANNELL

Purely in terms of how long I've spent playing them, the games that comprise the *Mario Kart* series. Every one has provided me with hours of entertainment!

Expertise: Games whose controllers don't require you to have 37 fingers
Currently playing: *Forbidden Forest*
Favourite game of all time: *H.E.R.O.*

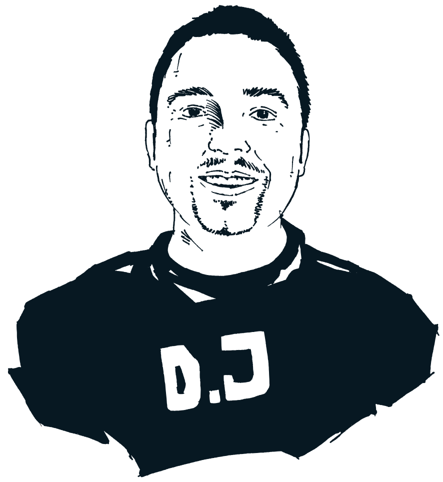


PAUL DRURY

The only sensible choice would be *Zelda* or *Mario*. Thus I nominate the *Dancing Stage* franchise for being such a delightful, guilty pleasure.

Expertise: Getting old programmers to confess their drug habits
Currently playing: *Guitar Hero*
Favourite game of all time: *Sheep In Space*

LOADING...



Here at Retro Gamer we're constantly looking forward, which is rather ironic, as our actual content is dependent on what has happened in the past.

Nevertheless we have plenty of juicy (not to mention exclusive) features lined up for you over the next few months and we'll be constantly tweaking the magazine so it remains the finely tuned retro publication that it is.

To tie in with our cover, there's the definitive history of Activision, one of the world's biggest publishers. Find out how it all started on page 32. Keeping with the Activision theme, David Crane discusses the creation of *Ghostbusters* on page 56 and reveals plenty of tricks of the trade. Paul Norman reveals what exactly could be found in his *Forbidden Forest* on page 70, while Mike Lamb and Gary Bracey explain the origins of *Target: Renegade* on page 24.

If that's not enough there's an inside look at the canned SNES game *Starfox 2* on page 28, reviews of two brand new shoot-'em-ups and an in-depth look at translating Japanese games into English. And all this for just £2.50 an issue if you subscribe. We must be mad…

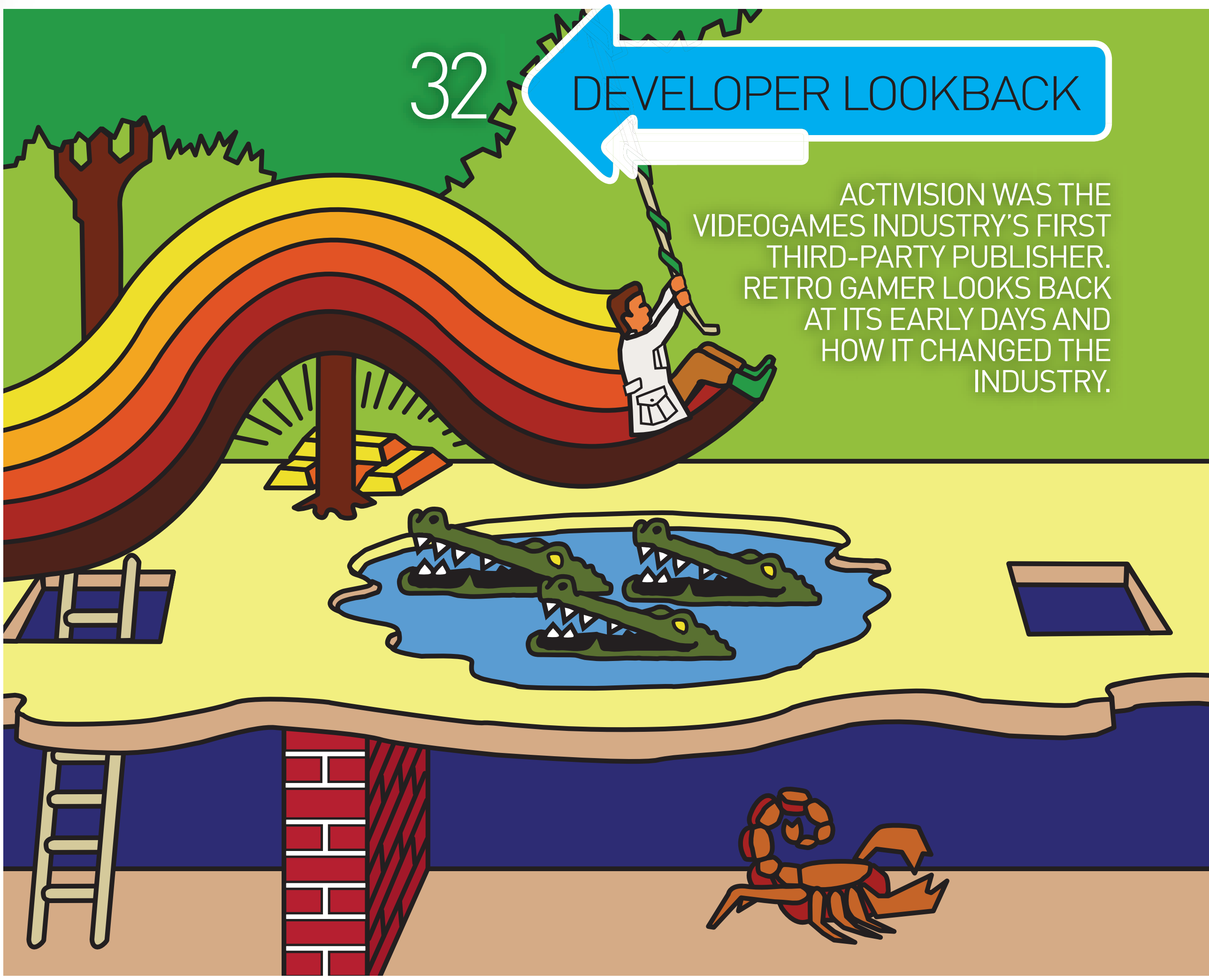
Enjoy the magazine





CONTENTS

BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES









INSIDE

At-a-glance retro sections…

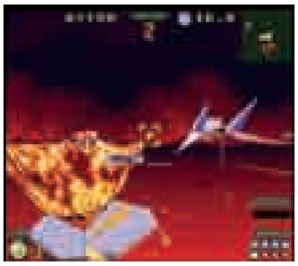
ESSENTIALS

RETROINSPECTION

AMSTRAD CPC 464

48 CONSIDERED A JOKE BY MANY C64 AND SPECTRUM OWNERS, SIR ALAN SUGAR'S CPC 464 WAS ACTUALLY A MIGHTY FINE PIECE OF 8-BIT KIT





28 WHATEVER HAPPENED TO...

STARFOX 2: WAS LOOKING LIKE BEING ONE OF THE MOST EXCITING SUPER FX TITLES FOR NINTENDO'S SNES, AND YET, IT WAS FRUSTRATINGLY CANCELLED. HERE'S WHY...

RETRORATED

THE GAMES LISTING...

If it's a bumper compilation or a great new remake, then Retro Rated is where you'll find it



retro GAMER SIZZLER



SUBSCRIBE TO RETRO GAMER

Can't stand the thought of missing the next marvellous edition of Retro Gamer? Then simply head on over to our subscriptions pages and place your order now!

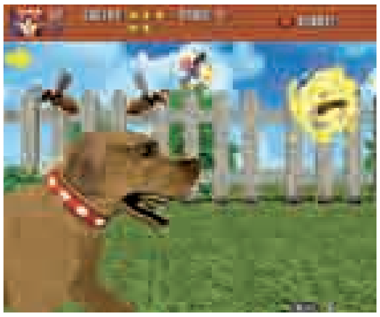
p110



COMPANY PROFILE

HI-TECH SOFTWARE

64 Despite its small size, Hi-Tech Software found itself linked with one of the biggest cartoon creators of the Eighties. David Crookes talks to the insiders.



ARCADE INSPECTION

MODEL 2

68 In a brand new feature Retro Gamer will be looking at classic arcade boards. This month's entry is Sega's impressive 3D Model 2 board.



EMULATION NATION

ROM TRANSLATIONS

102 What do you do when a game you're really looking forward to is only available in Japan? Why you simply translate it of course…

RETRO SCENE

96 **HOME-BREW NEWS** All the details on how to enter the Retro Remakes competition and an interview with its founder

98 **DEVELOPER DIARY** The latest instalment of the Ovine Boy's new project

100 **RETRO REMAKES** *Chase The Express* and Project *Paradroid* are this month's featured games

101 **EMULATE THIS** Mike Tooley guides you through the WinApe emulator

THE GUIDE

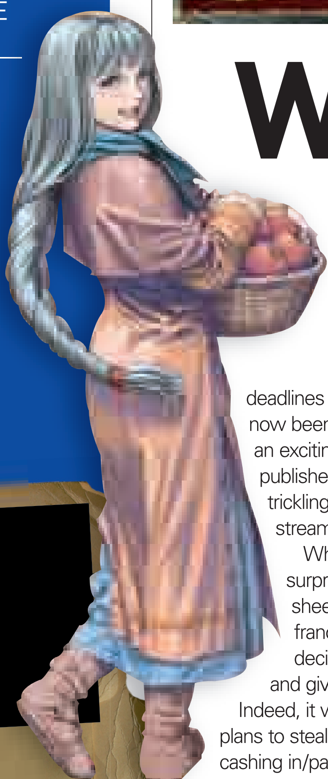
What's hot this issue…





WE'RE NOT SQUARE

SQUARE ENIX ANNOUNCES PLENTY OF CLASSIC FRANCHISES FOR E3



The run up to E3 – which, thanks to the wonderful deadlines of magazines has now been and gone – is always an exciting time, and many publishers have already started trickling through a steady stream of information.

What's been most surprising however is the sheer amount of classic franchises that Square has decided to brush down and give a new lease of life to. Indeed, it would appear that Square plans to steal Capcom's crown for cashing in/paying homage (delete as applicable) to past franchises and has a staggering amount of titles on the way.

One of the most exciting resurrections for us is the announcement of a new *Mana* title. *Dawn Of Mana* is the first true *Mana* sequel in over a decade and looks set to be a belter when it finally arrives on the PS2. Interestingly, *Dawn Of Mana* will dispense with the cute 2D visuals of the original games and will be fully 3D, although Square Enix insists that the new look will still capture the spirit of the original games. *Dawn Of Mana* is also set to reveal the truth of several legends including the origins of both the Mana Tree and the Sword of Mana.

After the recent success of the PS2's *Dragon Quest: The Journey Of The Cursed King* (the first *Dragon Quest* title to ever be released in the UK) it would appear that the next game will be arriving on Nintendo's DS. *Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime*, sees the player taking control of a slime – one of the franchises most popular monsters – as he fights his way through the kingdom of Slimenia. This being a Nintendo DS title you can expect *Rocket Slime* to feature plenty of cool abilities that just wouldn't be possible on any other console.

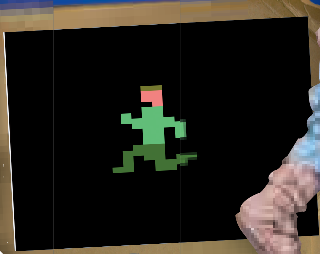
Fans of *Final Fantasy IV Advance* on the GBA may also be pleased to hear that Square intends to bring parts *V* and *VI* to Nintendo's portable handheld. Like the impressive *IV* outing, both game will be more than simple ports and will feature plenty of new additions, including brand new dungeons and several new job classes. No news on release dates yet, but considering we're still waiting for part *IV*, don't expect them to appear this side of Christmas.

Finally, Square has also revealed that it will be making two more *Valkyrie Profile* games. *Valkyrie Profile 2: Silmeria* is a true sequel and will be appearing on the PS2, while *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth* is due to appear on the PSP and is an updated version of the original PSOne game, with new CG cutscenes that will contain story links to *Silmeria*. No news if either game will be appearing in the UK, but seeing how the original didn't, you may not want to start holding your breath…



It may not look like a traditional *Mana* title, but all the cuteness remains intact. Please Square, don't mess this up

HERO OF THE MONTH



PITFALL HARRY

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero. This month it's the turn of David Crane's Pitfall Harry

First appearance: *Pitfall!*

Distinguishing features: Very blocky

Weapon of choice: Jumping over foes

Most likely to: Get voiced by Bruce Campbell

Least likely to: Get voiced by Tom Cruise

Unusual fact: *Pitfall!* was so successful that it stayed at the top of the US Billboard charts for 64 weeks

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 7: POPFUL MAIL



The NEC PC98 is a difficult computer to set up, so seeing the loading screen to Popful Mail is quite a relief. It also sets the tone for the light-hearted adventure head. Playing cheerful music it shows the main wizard boy run directly into the fiery breath of his blue-skinned friend, setting his cape on fire! Great stuff

JUST IN IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE METAL SLUG COLLECTION WILL NOW BE APPEARING ON THE WII AS WELL AS THE PSP. MORE NEXT MONTH...

FANGS A LOT

NEW INFORMATION ON THE DS'S LATEST CASTLEVANIA GAME



After last month's initial report on the DS's next *Castlevania* title, Konami has now given us plenty of new information. First up is that the new game is actually called *Castlevania: Portrait Of Ruin* and not *Dual Moons* as we announced last month.



We loved the last DS *Castlevania* game, but we'd be lying if we didn't say we're hoping the next will be even better

Created by Kogi Igarashi, *Portrait Of Ruins* will enable you to control two different characters, vampire hunter Jonathan Morris and magic user Charlotte Orlean and is set up so that you can switch between them whenever you want.

While the storyline once again sees the two heroes trying to stop the resurrection of Count Dracula, Konami has placed the series in a brand new setting – World War II.

It's not been revealed if Hitler will be appearing as an end of level boss (as he did in the Japanese NES version of *Bionic Commandos*) but we do know that there will be over a 100 different enemies to battle against as the heroic duo battle their way through the war-torn countryside. Both characters will also have access to new summon attacks that will enable them to raise demons, which can then be used against their enemies. There's been no indication yet to what sort of stylus implementation *Portrait Of Ruin* will feature, but hopefully it will be a bit more exciting than the ideas that appeared in *Castlevania: Dual Moons*. No news of a release date yet, but with any luck we'll be seeing it by the end of the year.

ARE YOU TAKING THE PISS?

NINTENDO REVEALS NEW NAME FOR ITS REVOLUTION

What colour will your Wii be? Sorry, couldn't resist…



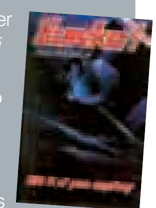


It would appear that Nintendo's Revolution has had a name change – one that's rather confusing to say the least. Whilst the name Revolution perfectly summed up Nintendo's new console, it obviously wasn't good enough, as Nintendo's new name for its revolutionary machine is apparently Wii (pronounced We).

We say apparently, because this could easily just be some clever viral marketing campaign to get people discussing the machine in the run up to this year's E3. Still, if it is the official name, then you can't help wonder what Nintendo is playing at. While the mission statement provided on its official website makes perfect sense – and together, Wii will change everything - it's going to be interesting to see how the name is pronounced and perceived by the general public. Nintendo already has a somewhat 'kiddy' image, so we can't wait to see how a console named after a bodily function (in the UK at least) fares.

GRUMPY OLD GAMER

EVERY MONTH, GRUMPY OLD GAMER INSISTS WHY OLD GAMES WERE BETTER...



Grumpy old gamer puts down *Mini Munchman* for a couple of minutes to ponder the frontier days of gaming, muttering "it wasn't Clive, and Sugar was too young then; who was it?" He gets up and looks to the window – "Eureka" he shouts, "It was Livingstone". Looking at his bemused wife the torrent swells, "if they could give £25k away back in 1985 for completing *Eureka*, and the competition was run to conclusion successfully, why aren't game companies offering prize money for all this new-fangled online gaming malarkey like Xbox Live? Surely it wouldn't be difficult to arrange online tournaments that emulate the competitions that the game emulates in the first place. They could introduce a two-tier product, one with competition entry, one without, even non-gamers might buy games, which could offset the development costs upstart developers keep moaning about. It was there in Smash TV, Eugene left a clue, 'big money big prizes I love it', gaming creates and TV imitates." Grumpy old gamer's wife speaks up "it's all corporate and politics now love, you know that, they don't create anymore, that was our day. I mean even Sir Alan has gone over to the BBC". Grumpy old gamer sinks back into his comfy chair and restarts *Munchman*; a smile flickers across his lips, it won't last…



AMERICA FREE RETRO★

YOUR U.S. TAKE ON THE RETRO SCENE WITH RETRO GAMING RADIO'S SHANE R MONROE



"HEROS OF GAMING"

Rarely does it happen when a company that practically INVENTS a market gets bested on its own playing field by defectors from its own company. But this is exactly what happened to Atari during the Atari 2600 days – its own people left to form other companies that out-performed its parent's.

Citing lack of recognition and unfair game-performance bonuses, several programmers from Atari bailed out in 1979 and formed the now-megalithic company Activision. This paved the way for other disgruntled programmers to leave and start their own companies – one of the most notable being Imagic in 1981.

These are well-worn stories for anyone who is a fan of these companies or was an active gamer back in the good old days. Anyone that listens to my RetroGaming Radio show has heard endless interviews with the pioneers of the industry including the key players of the fore-mentioned companies, David Crane, Gary Kitchen and many others. For some folks, these people are just programmers doing a job during the heyday of videogaming.

For me – these people are my heroes. And nothing is more gratifying… more exciting… than meeting your heroes.

Call me a geek, call me lame – but my hero worship doesn't come from sport athletes, movie stars, or wrestling gurus. I admire the people that had the biggest hand in fashioning my love for computers and gaming. I've met celebrities – no big deal; but I was nervous the first time I met David Crane. Not just because the man is a living legend, responsible for some of the most iconic games ever like *Pitfall!* – but because he's a big imposing guy! Originally we were told we could only interview him for a half an hour but David enjoyed talking to us so much he gave us almost two full hours of interview time. "I couldn't have been happier if I were twins". The stories, the philosophies, the presence… Katie Holmes can have Tom Cruise – I wanna kick it with Team Activision.

Gary Kitchen was in tow at the show too, and talking to him (THE man behind the infamous Gary Kitchen's GameMaker that put the power of game development into the hands of the masses) was like a baby listening to his mother's soothing voice from the womb. These men, through their works, are largely responsible for fostering my interest in computers, programming, and of course gaming.

Let's be honest, Activision was synonymous with quality back then. When a new Activision game came out, you didn't wait for a magazine review to tell you they rocked. You just bought it – sight unseen. The Activision logo on the box was enough. This was true of many companies that now produce 90% trash, 8% mediocrity and 2% gems; Electronic Arts, for example. Games that pushed the envelope… programmers that fought oppressive tyranny… heck, if they had done all this on horseback, they would have made it a movie!

We all have games we remember forever, and many of those games, for me, came from early Activision. Anyone remember a little game called *Ghostbusters* on the C64? How many times did you boot that damn game just so you could hit the spacebar during the intro to hear your computer say "GHOOOOSTTBUSSSTEEEERSS!?" Sure, the 8-bit computer version is still the best *Ghostbusters* title ever made, but there was something special about the bouncing ball karaoke version of the song playing before the game started. What about *Transformers* on the C64? How many people did you show the "intro" on Side B of that disc? The one that told the story – in full speech – of the *Transformers*? Just fess up – we all did it. Finally, who could forget the game that gave me hundreds of hours of entertaining insight into my own psyche – *Alter Ego*? All of these masterpieces of diversity came from one company: Activision – two of them right from Crane himself.



SHANE R MONROE IS THE PROUD OWNER OF POPULAR INTERNET RADIO SHOW, RETRO GAMING RADIO. HEAD ON OVER TO HTTP://WWW.RETROGAMINGRADIO.COM IF YOU WANT TO CATCH HIS LATEST SHOW.

What makes this all the more entertaining is that these third-party companies made better product than the founders. Imagic made some of the best games on the Atari 2600. Heck, I still play *Demon Attack* and *Cosmic Ark*. And who could forget *DragonFire*? Imagic went one step further and created a marketing masterpiece with its shiny metal-looking boxes and distinctive display stands – still recognizable today. In some cases, third-party companies created far superior remakes of first-party titles, which ended up being the ultimate slap in the face.

Yes, these people are my heroes. The pioneers of videogaming that didn't ship a game until it was READY. The ones that broke the traditional moulds – gave us better games, graphics and of course the first videogame Easter Eggs. The ones that gave up the reputed secret life of boozing and whoring behind the closed doors at Atari to strike out on their own and create masterpieces of gaming art.

These people have my respect and my gratitude. Without these icons leading the way, I would probably be washing cars for a living right now.

Keep it retro!
Shane

TRUTH AND LIES

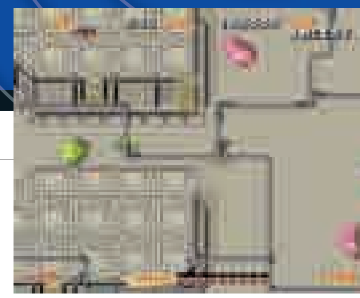
MORE SEGA SPECULATION AND A FEW NEW ANNOUNCEMENTS AS E3 APPROACHES

The run up to E3 is always rife with Sega rumours. The biggest piece of gossip is that *Nights* is heading to Nintendo's Wii. Sega of course is saying nothing, but when you look back at the original game, and the recent mini-game on the EyeToy's *Sega Superstars*, it's easy to see how the rumour initially started. Another story concerns Totally Games and the secret Sega arcade game it's working on. Totally Games' president Lawrence Holland has said the game is appearing on the PSP and "is a run-'n-gun blast-a-thon, drawing its inspiration from such timeless arcade classics as *Robotron* and *Smash TV*."

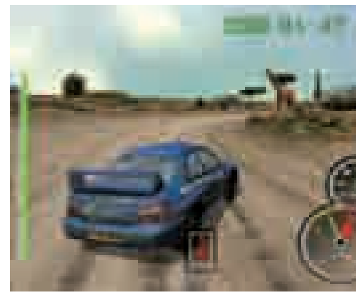
Most people's money seems to be on an update of *Space Harrier*, or better yet, *Planet Harriers*, but we reckon it's quite possibly *Alien Syndrome*.

While the world continues to speculate, what we do know is that two classic franchises are heading to the PS3, PC and Xbox 360. *Sega Rally Revolution* and *Phantasy Star Universe* have both been recently announced in the run up to E3 and should be playable at the actual event. We're looking forward to *Sega Rally Revolution*, as the recent 2006 version was disappointing, with the best thing about it being the original arcade game. Sega is taking no chances with its new next-gen title though and it's already sounding mighty impressive with fully deformable environments and superior AI being just a few of the enhancements that Sega Driving Studio is promising.

Next up is Sonic Team's *Phantasy Star Universe*. We've lost count of the huge bills we ran up on the original Dreamcast games, so it's going to be refreshing to actually save some money, especially now its been announced for the Xbox 360. Sonic Team is promising an epic offline adventure, which will feature more than 40 hours of gameplay and sees you playing as 17-year-old cadet Ethan Waber. With over 200 weapon variations, the ability to control vehicles and more than 20 unique species, we can see many hours being wasted online…



» Could Totally Games' new Sega licence be an update of *Alien Syndrome*?



» *Phantasy Star* Online was aces on the Dreamcast, this next-gen title is looking even better



A FASCINATING BEHIND-THE-SCENES LOOK AT THE GAMES INDUSTRY COURTESY OF THE CREATORS OF DIZZY

THE OLIVER TWINS NEED YOU!

Fancy learning about the games industry? Then you may be interested to hear that Blitz Games is giving 50 students a unique behind-the-scenes of its new offices.

Set over two days (16 June and the 06 July) each group of 25 students will be given a complete tour of the Blitz studios, a series of presentations about how games are created, and most importantly, be giving a chance to quiz senior executives, lead programmers, designers, animators, artists and producers.

"It's like 'Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory' for students that want to enter the games industry!" reveals Philip Oliver, CEO and co-founder of Blitz Games. "We hope this will lead to real careers for some of the lucky few that apply to visit, if nothing else they will have a brilliant day and learn so much."

Blitz is further sweetening the deal by offering sponsorship to 10 lucky visitors, which will result in all their travel and accommodation expenses being paid for on the day. Just make sure your application is sent in to Blitz games by the 31 March.

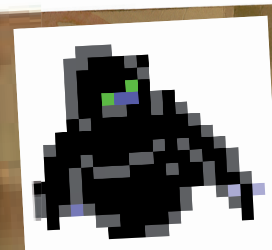
More info can be found at www.BlitzGames.com



» *If you're interested in a job in videogames Andrew and Philip Oliver are more than happy to give you a tour of their new offices*



VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



DEATH

Without a bad villain there would be no good heroes. What would Superman be without Lex Luthor? What would He-Man be without Skeletor? Rubbish, that's what. This month: *Gauntlet*'s Death

First Appearance: *Gauntlet*

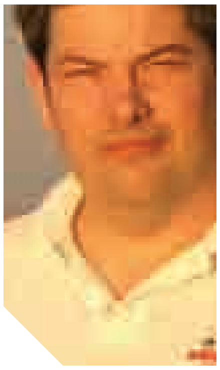
Distinguishing Features: Piercing green eyes

Weapon of Choice: His touch means death

Most likely to: Chase stupid adventurers

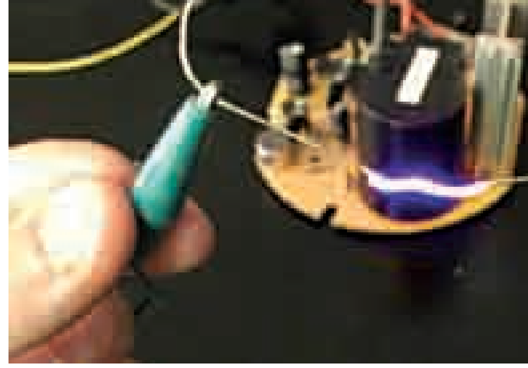
Least likely to: Enter a long-term relationship with Thyra the Valkyrie

Unusual fact: You can manipulate Death's point value by shooting at him, or kill him by teleporting on top of him





» And this is what a 3 million volt domestic Tesla coil looks like. Don't try this at home kids



» At this prototype stage I'm probably generating about 20 Kv, if only I knew what was going to happen next…



» In the end I decided to take my photos from a safe six feet…

"YOU'VE PROBABLY SEEN THE SORT OF BIG FAT SPARKS IN THIRTIES FRANKENSTEIN FILMS" ARCHER MACLEAN

COMMENT

BEING IN CHARGE OF SFX …

MUSINGS FROM THE MIND OF MACLEAN

Over the years I have enjoyed creating sound effects for various games by resorting to poking a microphone at things and recording them, and then tidying them up or twiddling them about in a package like Sound Forge.

These effects have ranged from whacking a wooden spoon against a saucepan for the game start gong in *IK+*, to dragging a balloon down a window pain for the chalk sounds in *Jimmy Whites Snooker 1*, to putting an incredibly heavy metal one-armed-bandit on my desk to grab the mechanical reels all whirring around for the fruit machine noises in *Cueball 2*, and more recently making splurging noises for the Vacuum Pipe sounds on *Mercury 1*.

But throughout all of that I've never caused so much damage and annoyance as the time I tried sampling the sound of high energy electrical sparks when I needed them for the final stage in *Cueball World*, back in 2000. Now, most sensible SFX people these days would simply buy an effects library or find something on the Internet, but I enjoy trying to create things myself from time to time.

You've probably seen the sort of big fat sparks I am referring to in old Thirties *Frankenstein* films where they show a mad scientist's lab with various four-foot tall metal poles in the shape of a narrow 'V' with slowly rising sparks sizzling their way to the top of the two poles, before breaking with a powerful snapping sound. My background was electronics and I knew these devices to be called 'Jacobs ladders', and I also knew how to make them in my own mad lab, so here's the science bit: late one Sunday evening I built a low voltage 20khz square wave oscillator, driving a power transistor with a couple of reverse blocking diodes, hooked up to the primary of a car ignition coil, and after a bit of tuning I was getting at least 100,000 volt spark gap jumps. This is enough to make the blue sparks produce huge amounts of Ozone as well as some seriously loud noises.

When it was all working, I stuck a microphone about two-foot away, but for some reason it seemed to not work, so I tried another one and that also appeared to be dead, even though both had been fine ten minutes before. I then decided to take some close-up digital photos of the sparks in action, and downloaded them into Paintshop Pro. But to my surprise all of the close-up pics had hundreds of little white dots all over them….

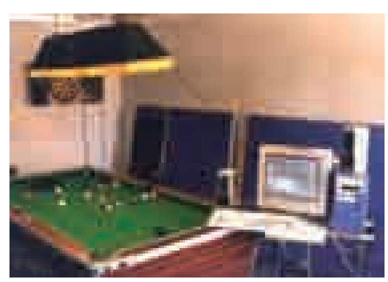
At which point the penny dropped. What was going on was that the immense amount of 'electrical noise' (like in a thunder storm except two feet away) was inducing so much charge in the cameras CCD sensor (and probably the mic's delicate bits too) that it had ruined everything. And to make matters worse the white specs were still there a couple of days later and it looked like I'd permanently damaged the camera. As it was under warranty I sent it back to the maker who returned it with a note saying I "shouldn't take pictures of high energy tesla coils using a digital camera with a Charged Coupled Device/CCD inside it, and to use a film-based one next time". They added that the white pixels would discharge over time. Which luckily they did.

But the funniest thing of all was that after destroying everything with my home made lightning, I went down the pub to console myself with a few pints. As I walked in the bar I realised there was a lot more people in there on a Sunday night than normal, and I eventually asked someone why. He said it was because there was something wrong with the TV reception that night, probably due to atmospheric conditions interfering with the television reception…

Ooooopps. I went a nice shade of red whilst trying to change the subject, and now they're going find out the truth. Oh, and err, don't try this at home.



» Recording a one-armed bandit on my desk



» Recording some ball and dart sound effects for *Cueball 2*

eMag

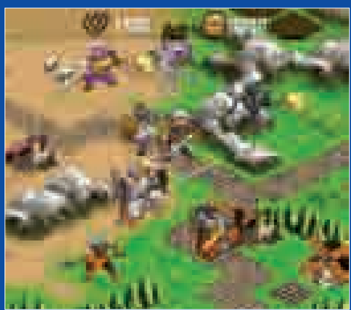
retro GAMER DIARY

EVENT HOSTING retro GAMER

IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

Just because Retro Gamer looks to the past that doesn't mean that there aren't games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list.



MAY '06

THE AGE OF KINGS

Released: 26 May

Publisher: THQ

Price: £34.99

Format: DS

Considering how well suited the DS is to the genre, it's amazing to think that a game like *Age Of Empires: The Age of Kings* has taken so long to appear on Nintendo's portable console. Fortunately, it's looking like the wait has been worth it, as an early play on the US version proved to be pretty good fun and played like a dream. Expect a full review in a future issue.



JUNE '06

ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

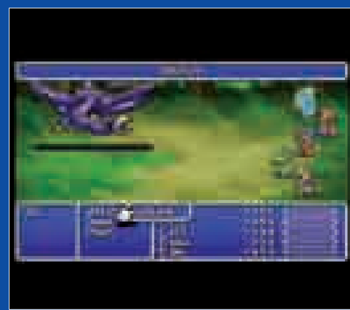
Released: 02 June

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

Good old Capcom. We've had a recent play on the stunning *Ultimate Ghosts 'N Goblins* and it's already looking like an absolute blinder of a game. The visuals are fantastic, the music utterly ace and the gameplay has plenty of new additions that will please new gamers and old fans alike. June can't come quickly enough.



JUNE '06

FINAL FANTASY 4 ADVANCE

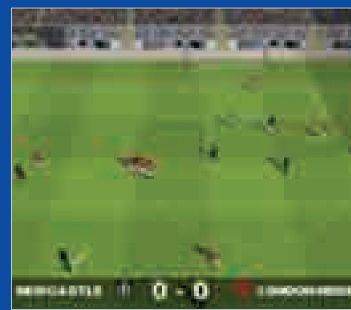
Released: 02 June

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: GBA

Now this is how to remake a game. It's been released in the US for a while now, but this adaptation of the hit SNES game is nearly with us and looks great. Featuring a terrific translation, new enemies and dungeons and plenty of little tweaks, this RPG looks essential and should appeal to those who played the original or just enjoy classic RPGs.



JUNE '06

SENSIBLE SOCCER

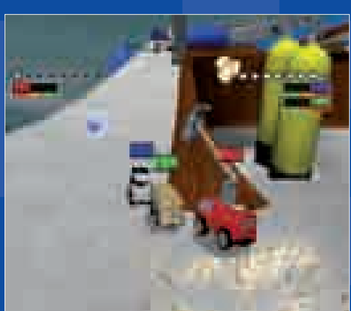
Released: 09 June

Publisher: Codemasters

Price: £39.99

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC, DS, PSP

Not long now. Jon Hare's remake of his classic Amiga game is nearly with us and we're getting more and more excited about it. Everything's looking decidedly cute and the animation throughout is wonderful. It could be argued that there's no need for a new version when the original game is as good as ever, but hey this is *Sensible* bloody *Soccer*, it's going to be wicked.



JUNE '06

MICRO MACHINE V4

Released: 09 June

Publisher: Codemasters

Price: £39.99

Format: PS2, Xbox, PC, DS, PSP

While it's great to see that the *Micro Machine* franchise is being resurrected, we're a little worried about the DS version, mainly because the bottom screen features a steering wheel that can be manipulated with either your finger or stylus. Yes, it can be controlled with the D-pad, but surely Codemasters could have thought of a better use of the second screen? After all, didn't they play Ridge Racer DS?



JULY '06

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA ANTHOLOGY

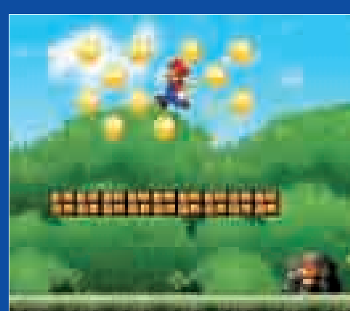
Released: 07 July

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £39.99

Format: PS2

We love Capcom. Not only does it release constantly innovative games (the incoming *Okami* looks amazing) it also showers plenty of love on retro gamers. After last year's wonderful *Capcom Classics Collection*, its new *Street Fighter Alpha Anthology* is looking like another essential purchase. All four *Alpha* games are included as well as the wonderful *Pocket Fighters.*



JULY '06

NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

Released: 07 July

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £34.99

Format: DS

The suspense is getting absolutely unbearable. now. We're yet another month closer to *New Super Mario Bros* and we've still not had a chance to play the damn game yet. Nintendo keeps tantalising us with new screenshots and videos but, unfortunately, that's all we're getting at the moment. We've got every faith that it will be great though, if not we'll stick on a pair of dungarees and start jumping on tortoises.



JULY '06

CAPCOM CLASSIC COLLECTION REMIXED

Released: 14 July

Publisher: Capcom

Price: £34.99

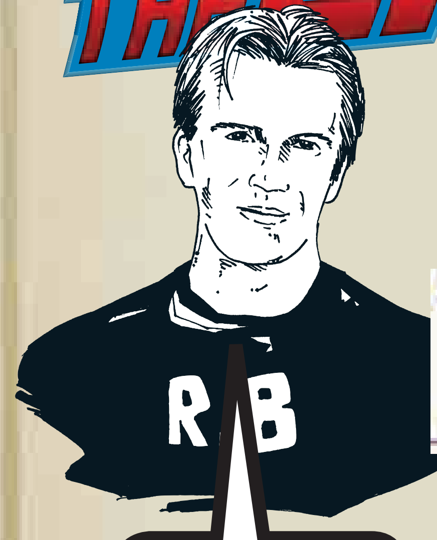
Format: PSP

Yes it's been frustratingly delayed, but now we've got actual finished US code, the pain has become a little easier to bear. After all, life now has a purpose – not only have we got an arcade-perfect port of *Strider* in the palm of our hands, we can play the game whenever and wherever we want. Sure, there's a few other games on there, but didn't you hear us? We have Strider and it rocks!

eMag

BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JUNE 1986



Commodore received a financial kicking once more but came out fighting with a new machine. US Gold get another World Cup Carnival mauling but still manage to pull in wads of cash. And Maradona incurs the wrath of every English football fan ever. Richard Burton goes in two footed…



» "The makeover is complete. From brown and bull-nosed to cream, sleek and streamlined – ladies and gentlemen, the C64c

Some things change and some things just stay the same. When Commodore announced its latest set of financial figures, it was no surprise that it had made a loss once again. However, this time it had managed its biggest drop to date. Commodore showed an awful pre-tax loss for the first quarter of 1986 with just under a £25 million loss on sales of £121.5 million worldwide.

One of Commodore's problems was that it was not performing in the US market. However, sales in Europe counteracted the US blip, no doubt supported by the C64 and the new Amiga machines. Europe was accounting for over half of Commodore's worldwide sales.

Furthermore, the future looked just a wee bit rosier with the news that the proposed enhanced version of the C64, the C64c, was due for its official launch in the USA later in the month. The UK release of the machine was to follow shortly but Commodore had not confirmed a definite release date for it. It also confirmed, rather unsurprisingly, that the original C64 would cease production.

The new look machine was slimmer in style, fitting in with the new family of C128 and Amiga systems. It also came with a disk operating system, GEOS, a rather smart graphical user interface using icons and windows. Now that is an idea that really could catch on…

With the original C64 still pulling in the punters and the expected surge of interest in the newly chiselled C64c, Commodore hoped this would finally alleviate the financial woes the company had been suffering of late.

The Amiga was also selling incredibly well with the initial batch of 1,000 machines selling out within a week in the United Kingdom. With sales on the up and a breeze of buoyant optimism blowing through the company after several months of doom and gloom, Commodore could be forgiven for thinking it had finally turned the corner.

Amstrad's newly designed Spectrum Plus 2 was nearing completion just a couple of months after Amstrad acquired Sinclair Research. The layout of the new machine was, as people expected, a machine with a proper keyboard and a combined data recorder, similar to the CPC series. The machine was pencilled in for a release around September and a tentative price tag of £140 was touted.

Attracting most of the headlines for June's software news were two stories: the further shenanigans of the *World Cup Carnival* fiasco and *Spitting Image* (the rubbery puppet programme) getting the hump with Domark.

World Cup Carnival, the travesty of a football game, was once again making headlines. After successfully lashing up the biggest football licence going by firstly producing a game even US Gold deemed to awful too release, it then had the audacity to palm the game-playing public off with Artic's *World Cup*.

US Gold reported that its newly enhanced version of the game would be superb. 'Enhanced' plainly meant the free wall chart, sticker and hype that surrounded the release. The actual game itself had changed very little from the original.

Even more incredible was the startling news it had somehow attained number one spot in the software charts. Thankfully, reports of the game being returned by livid customers were painfully frequent for US Gold as stunned gamers came to realise what they had been suckered into purchasing.

Domark also had a problem with its newest software title, *Splitting Images*. The fast moving jigsaw-like puzzle game had a title very similar to that of the satirical comedy programme, *Spitting Image*.

Spitting Image immediately took offence to the games title and demanded it be withdrawn from sale. Although Domark believed it was quite within its rights to use the title and to avoid a potentially expensive court case, it recalled the few hundred units of the game that had slipped out and the game was promptly renamed *Split Personalities*.

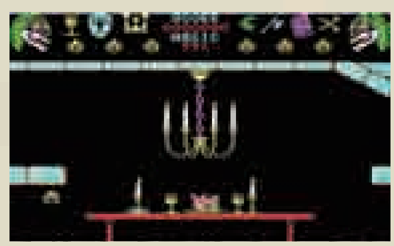


» **Left:** The game that got Domark into hot water. Strangely Domark went on to release an official *Spitting Image* game **Right:** Two adventures on one tape for 99 new pennies. Not a bad deal compared to *World Cup Carnival*

Central Solutions, one of many budget games producers, decided to go one step further and become even more budget minded. Releasing a swath of its catalogue at the truly cheap price of 99p, it hoped that it would pull in a bigger market share with such competitively priced games. The first round of cheapo software releases to hit the shops was the *Double Play Adventures* series.

After a couple of subdued months in the award presenting departments of the Newsfield trio of magazines, all three were flashing their Sizzlers, Accolades and Smashes all over the place. Plainly the summer software push had started…

In the pages of Zzap!64, there were a great set of titles receiving the Sizzlers this



» More spookiness a plenty and pumpkins galore with Palace Software's sequel to *Cauldron*, um… *Cauldron 2*…

1986



» Branson's boat smashed the Atlantic crossing record but didn't get the Blue Riband. Never mind, a mint Viscount is nicer



» Maradona shows his many sporting talents by turning to volleyball midway through a football match

JUNE NEWS

Virgin owner, Richard Branson broke the world record for the fastest crossing of the Atlantic on the 29th June. In his Virgin Atlantic Challenger II he smashed the existing record by over two hours to claim the record.

However, the Blue Riband, the trophy awarded to the record holder, was not presented to Mr Branson, as he had breached two rules of the competition; the speedboat had no commercial maritime purpose and it had stopped to refuel.

On the 10th June, Patrick Magee was found guilty of planting the bomb that ripped apart the Grand Hotel in Brighton where Margaret Thatcher and members of the cabinet were staying during the Conservative Party Conference of 1984. The blast killed five people including two Conservative MPs.

Magee received eight life sentences and it was recommended he serve a minimum of 35 years in prison. Magee was released in June 1999, after serving 14 years of the sentence, as part of the Good Friday Agreement's early release scheme.

With the 13th FIFA World Cup in Mexico in full flow, the 22nd June saw one of the best ever goals in the history of the competition and one the finest examples of outright filthy cheating, occurring in the same match and by the same player.

Maradona's superb solo effort against England in the quarterfinal left everyone in awe but was still overshadowed by the infamous Hand Of God 'goal' that he palmed over Peter Shilton's head. Argentina went on to meet West Germany in the final, defeating them 3-2.

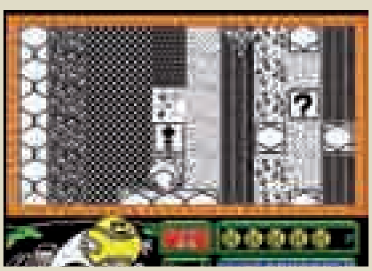
month. *Cauldron 2: Revenge Of The Pumpkin* (Palace Software), *Starquake* (Bubble Bus), *International Karate* (System 3), *Spellbound* (Mastertronic/MAD), *Doomdark's Revenge* (Beyond), *Kentilla* (Mastertronic) and *Fairlight* (The Edge). *Spindizzy* (Electric Dreams) was awarded the Gold Medal with an impressive 98% overall.

Amtix! compared favourably with a venerable crop of top-notch titles attaining an Accolade. *Batman* (Ocean), *Movie* (Imagine), *Zoids* (Martech), *Redhawk* (Melbourne House), *Runestone* (Firebird), *Waterloo* (Lothlorien), *The Way Of The Tiger* and *Bounder* (both Gremlin Graphics) and *Doomsday Blues* (PSS/ERE Informatique), all faired extremely well.

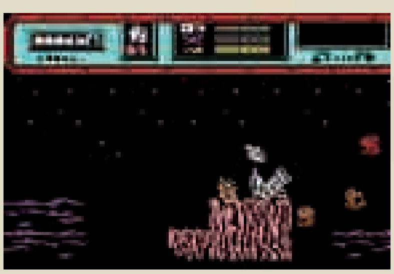
Several Crash Smashes were also being bandied about. *Spindizzy* (Electric Dreams) again received top honours bringing it a complete set of awards spanning all formats. *Knight Tyme* (Mastertronic) also made a tiny bit of history in being the first ever 128K Smash. The other Smash award winners were *Redhawk* (Melbourne House), *Heavy On The Magick* (Gargoyle Games), *Desert Rats* (CCS), *Bounder* (Gremlin Graphics), *Pentagram* (Ultimate) and *Quazatron* (Hewson Consultants).



» Say Kwah! From newspaper photographer to superhero in a single bound. Unoriginal premise, original and entertaining adventure



» Keep bouncing your balls whilst keeping them away from darts, spikes and other nastiness. That is good advice at any time

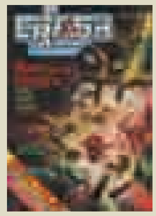


» Cutsie and colourful, *Starquake* proved to be a big favourite amongst gamers. Bubble Bus Software – you did good



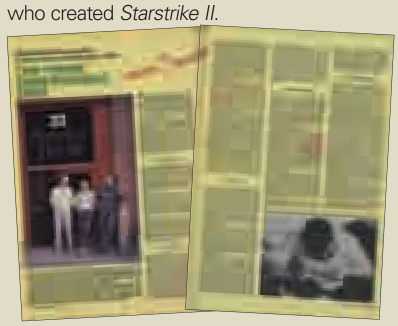
» More wizards, more puzzles and yet more 3D gaming in Ultimate's latest offering, *Pentagram*

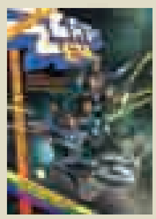
THIS MONTH IN...



Crash Flash

Issue 29 of Crash highlighted Oliver Frey's superb monster drawing skills with an atmospheric *Heavy On The Magick* themed cover. Inside the magazine there was an interview with the Realtime Software team who created *Starstrike II*.

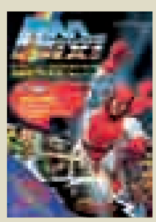




Zzap! Back

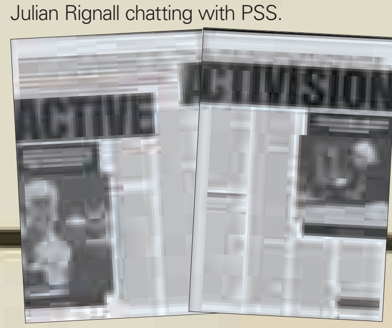
"The Magnificent Seven Reviewers", as the cover proclaims, showed the Zzap! team suited and booted in blue skin-tight space gear, firing off lasers and cruising through space on a bull-nosed C64. They're fighting for justice in the games universe… apparently…





Amtix! Antics

Say Kwah! Amtix! supplied a superhero cover featuring a garnish of comic book overtones as the game *Redhawk* got the cover treatment. Inside there was an interview with Gary Liddon talking to Activision and Julian Rignall chatting with PSS.



CHARTS

JUNE 1986



AMSTRAD

1. Kane (Mastertronic)
2. Green Beret (Imagine)
3. Batman (Ocean)
4. Radzone (Mastertronic)
5. Biggles (Mirrorsoft)



SPECTRUM

1. Knight Tyme (Mastertronic)
2. World Cup Carnival (US Gold)
3. Batman (Ocean)
4. Pentagram (Ultimate)
5. Ninja Master (Firebird)

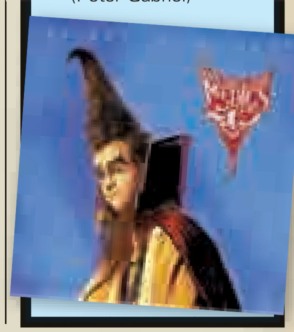


COMMODORE 64

1. Silent Service (Microprose/ US Gold)
2. International Karate (System 3)
3. Thrust (Firebird)
4. Way Of The Tiger (Gremlin Graphics)
5. World Cup Carnival (US Gold)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART JUNE '86

1. Spirit In The Sky (Doctor & The Medics)
2. Holding Back The Years (Simply Red)
3. I Can't Wait (Nu Shooz)
4. Addicted To Love (Robert Palmer
5. Sledgehammer (Peter Gabriel)



BACK TO THE EIGHTIES

A-Z OF THE 80s



After numerous requests to extend the Back To The Eighties section we've decided to look at what else was happening around the world when we were all hunched over our computer screens.

A IS FOR…





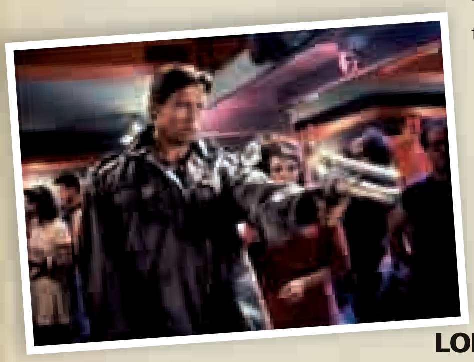
AIRWOLF

From its synthesiser intro to Jan Michael Vincent's atrocious mullet, *Airwolf*, along with *Knight Rider* and *The A-Team*, was the definition of Eighties action TV. Created by Donald P Bellisario *Airwolf* initially started off well, with gritty storylines that were often steeped in symbolism, superb action scenes and plenty of drama. Sadly, the powers that be at CBS, wanted its new show to reach a wider audience, and began to tone the darkness down. By its third series *Airwolf* was a shadow of its former self and featured dull storylines and little of the excitement of the first two seasons.

Airwolf was eventually cancelled by CBS at the end of its third season, but was soon snapped up by a small TV company named Atlantis. With sod all budget available the cast were replaced, all the flying scenes were simply stock footage from the previous three seasons, while the model work that was available looked like it had been knocked together on Blue Peter. Still, you gotta love that theme tune…

ARNIE

How can you not mention the Eighties without paying homage to the Governor of California? Whilst the muscle-bound Austrian has only recently left the multiplexes (his last appearance was in 2004's *Around The World In 80 Days*) it's the Eighties' Arnie that everyone fondly remembers. *Predator*, *Commando*, *Conan The Barbarian*, *The Terminator*, the list just goes on and on. So what if the Austrian Oak had the vocabulary of a five-year-old, possessed a string of one-liners that could sink the Titanic and couldn't act his way out of a paper bag – although he'd easily punch his way through it – Arnie was the definitive action man.



» Arnie speaks only 17 lines in the whole of *Terminator*, we wonder why

AN AMERICAN WEREWOLF IN LONDON

John Landis' superb horror is not only liberally coated with lashings of black humour, it also boasts one of the best werewolf transformations that movie goers have ever witnessed. At times brutally horrific, at others, ball-achingly funny, *American Werewolf* remains a cult classic that few other creature-features have since matched. Landis may have long since gone off the boil, overdue sequel *An American Werewolf In Paris* was quite frankly shite, but his creature flick remains one of the best examples of the genre. Oh, and Jenny Agutter's tits were amazing.

AVIATORS

When *Top Gun* appeared in 1986 several things happened. Tom Cruise proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that he was going to be massive, Meg Ryan and *ER*'s Anthony Edwards popped up in supporting roles, Berlin managed to get to the number one spot with the cringe-inducing *Take My Breath Away* and sales for Aviator sunglasses went through the roof. Granted the expensive glasses didn't have a chance of turning you into Tom Cruise, but at least they made you feel cool. Right?

A-HA

No matter what you may have thought of their music, you couldn't help but be impressed by A-HA's video debut *Take On Me*. Recently spoofed in an episode of *Family Guy*, it's a superb slice of Eighties pop culture and features the sort of high-pitched warbling from Morten Harket that can only be achieved in very tight trousers.



» *Take On Me* has been covered by Reel Big Fish and of course, by the awful A1



» These glasses were guaranteed to get the ladies talking about you… though we're not sure what they were saying

ALIENS

Whether James Cameron's sequel is actually better than Ridley Scott's classic original is a moot point. It still remains one of the most exciting science-fiction films of the Eighties and is the last truly great film in what's now a rather sorry franchise. Classic lines 'Game over Man', wonderfully-paced action scenes, a great performance from Sigourney Weaver and some superb Stan Winston creatures all combine to create one of Cameron's finest moments. Now all you have to do is decide if the over indulgent Director's Cut was actually worth it…



» *Aliens* was nominated for seven Academy awards and took home Sound Effects Editing and Visual Effects



» Alison Moyet had six top-ten singles in the Eighties… and none since



ALISON MOYET

The big Essex lass with the voice to match had big success in the Eighties thanks to hits like *All Cried Out*, *Weak In The Presence Of Beauty* and *Invisible*. Moyet originally found fame as the female half of Yazoo, before embarking on her successful solo career.

ADIDAS SPORTS CLOTHING

Before Nike was the epitome of coolness Adidas was the label to be seen in. Deluded teenagers would wear laceless trainers because they thought it made them look cool, while DMC preferred the shell-toed style. If you were really with it though, you went for the two-piece 'god this is so scratchy' polyester tracksuit. Sure they look awful now, but when you consider the alternative (shell suits) there really wasn't an option…

AIRPLANE!

So funny you could well bust a proverbial gut, *Airplane!* is a running gag-fest that gleefully takes the piss out of the airport disaster movies that were so popular at the time and is liable to have you in tears of laughter. The troika of Jim Abrahams, and David and Jerry Zucker threw every single joke they could think of into the mix, and while there are a few duds, the majority are priceless. Full of laugh out loud moments, *Airplane!* made a star out of Leslie Neilson (previously seen in more serious roles) and remains one of the funniest films of the Eighties. Priceless.

THE A-TEAM

The A-Team was an instant world wide syndicated smash. The synopsis was that the main protagonists had been framed and charged for a crime they didn't commit. On the run in their totally inconspicuous black van, like Jesus they served to help the meek, usually against redneck militias that had moved in on a farm. The A-Team consisted of four men: BA Baracas, with his 400kg of gold chains; Face, the brains of the operation and a lady's man operating it all from the back of a van; Murdoch, the institutionalised pilot; and Hannibal, loving it as his plans came together. Their adventures kept the world gripped for five years. We learnt that cars could roll 12 times only for the hick drivers to step out unharmed and that you could fire off 500 rounds of ammunition in a two minute blur of violence without hurting anyboy. Taking its lead from *Blue Peter*, *The A-Team* also taught us that a tractor, 15 bales of hay and a couple of lead pipes could suppress the most ferocious of invasion force, including air strikes. We wouldn't be who we are today without these guys.

ADAM AND THE ANTS

New Romanticism swept though the Eighties music charts faster than Homer Simpson at an 'all you can eat' buffet and gave popstars the perfect excuses to raid their girlfriends' makeup boxes and indulge in some manly dressing up. Adam Ant was one of the most flamboyant cases and would regularly give Boy George a run for his money. If you've not seen his amazing Prince Charming dance you've not lived.







» Adidas has recently taken-over rivals Reebok to challenge Nike





» **Auf Wiedersehen Pet is one of the UK's most successful comedies**





MORE As!

SAD CLOTHES YOU WORE

Acid Washed Jeans
Airbrushed T-Shirts
Alice Bands
Angora Sweaters
Ankle Socks
Argyle Socks
Armani Jumpers
Army Jackets
Asymmetrical Haircuts

OTHER BANDS YOU SWOONED OVER

A Flock Of Seagulls
ABC
ACDC
Aerosmith
Alan Parsons Project
Anthrax
Aztec Camera

MORE TV SHOWS YOU LOVED

Alfred Hitchcock Presents
All Creatures Great And Small
Amazing Stories
Another World
Auf Wiedersehen Pet
Automan

MORE FILMS YOU WERE WATCHING

Absolute Beginners
Action Jackson
Amadeus
Annie
April Fools Day
Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes

KIDS SHOWS YOU WERE ENJOYING

Adventures Of Teddy Ruxpin
Alf
The All-new Ewoks
All-new Scooby And Scrappy Doo
Alvin & The Chipmunks



CHARTS!

Highest Grossing 80s films of all time

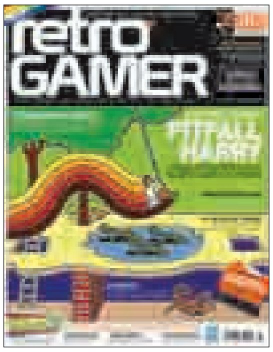
1	E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial ($399.8m*) 1982
2	Return Of The Jedi ($309.1m*) 1983
3	The Empire Strikes Back ($290.2m*) 1980
4	Batman ($251.2m) 1989
5	Raiders Of The Lost Ark ($242.4m*) 1981
6	Ghostbusters ($238.6m*) 1984
7	Beverly Hills Cop ($234.8m) 1984
8	Back To The Future ($210.6m) 1985
9	Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade ($197.2m) 1989
10	Tootsie ($177.2m) 1982

* Includes pre-2002 releases

Special Thanks to: The A-Team shrine, The Film Asylum, Cult-Cinema and Alisas

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



CONTACT US

Snail Mail
Retro Gamer
Imagine Publishing
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset
BH2 6EQ

Email
retrogamer@
imagine-publishing.co.uk

STAR LETTER!

START THEM YOUNG

Dear Retro Gamer,
You know something? I think I'm starting to get fed up with the modern gaming industry. I'm only 14, so you probably think I'm too young to understand half the stuff written in the mag (which is a very nice read by the way) but you'd be wrong. I actually bother to look up the predecessors to the 'classics' of modern gaming and love discovering their history. The amount of my friends that think that *Prince Of Persia* and *Metal Gear Solid* only came out on the PlayStation is both unbelievable and very, very sad.

Kids today are forced upon by games companies to buy the newest game that often isn't that good, and you lot (the parents) are the ones at the end of the line. We will beg for a movie tie-in (well, I wouldn't, but I'm speaking on behalf of most children my age) until you fork out your pockets and lose £40 on something that could be better spent elsewhere.

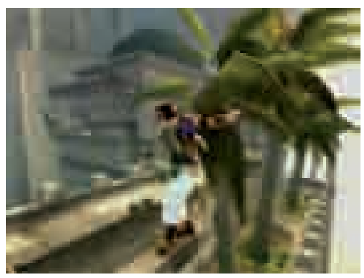
Parents, buy your kid a retro console, sit them down and let them play the old versions of their favourite games. They'll probably hate you for it, but it should teach them to be far more appreciative

Another thing that annoys me is when all my friends will only buy a game if its got decent graphics. I told my mate to play on *Super Mario Kart*, but he wouldn't touch it, as the 16-bit graphics were "rubbish". I had to get out *Mario Kart* on the Nintendo DS and beat him on that instead…

Sure, I can't wait for the next *Final Fantasy*, or *Zelda* game, but I will never forget their origins, I just wish others my age felt the same.

Daniel Smith, Powys

It's great to hear that classic machines and games are being enjoyed by a new generation of gamers, even if you are in the minority at the moment. Still, you're fighting the cause for retro and trying to convert the ignorant masses, which can only be a good thing. Have a Fossil watch for your efforts. Are there any other young readers out there?



STAY ON TARGET

Dear Retro Gamer,
Can I just thank you for your kind words in issue 23 when you reported on the progress of *Target: Renegade Remix!* I have never thought of myself as a 'talented' programmer before (or since) but it was exciting to see my name in print all the same. Just to let you know that work is continuing and if you keep you eye on havsoft.co.uk you might just find a new demo of the game to try out…

I'd also like to join the legions of fans congratulating you on the renewed magazine. I enjoyed the 'old' Retro Gamer (so much so that I subscribed) and would read every issue, but I must say that the new look and style is excellent and a definite improvement. 'New' Retro Gamer is the only magazine that I read from cover to cover (does that make me old, sad or both?) with my personal favourite being the excellent Conversion Capers. It's fascinating to see how games varied in quality across the variety of different formats and as a Speccy owner I admit to a slight envy of all those C64 games that just seemed so much better – now of course I can sit a little more snugly. Finally, the old disk/no disk debate. I did enjoy many of the CDs that came with the old Retro Gamer, especially the compilations of old titles or collections linked to a theme. Perhaps, there could be the occasional CD linked to special events or features i.e. Retro Themed Competitions (Retro Remakes 2006 Competition would be a good example) or a selection of titles from a former company (which could be linked to an article inside the mag). Not only could you read about the different conversions of a game for different systems, but you could experience them for yourself.

Anyway, I've waffled enough! Keep up the good work at Retro Gamer Towers!

Regards,
Havard Spring 'Talented' Programmer

We loved the original Target: Renegade *(check out the making of feature on page 24) so we've been watching the progress of* Target: Renegade Remix! *for quite some time. Make sure you let us know when it's finished and we'll put it in the home-brew review section.*





EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive a cool Fossil arcade watch courtesy of those lovely people at Fossil and Atari. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls; failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

OUT WITH THE NEW…

Hi guys,
Having just picked up my first copy of your magazine, I felt compelled to write to you and congratulate you on a wonderful publication. Within two hours of picking up Retro Gamer I had signed up for a subscription. The quality and variety of the clearly well-researched articles is sublime and I have been avidly reading each article.

My interest in gaming has spanned over 20 years and began with the cartridge-based Atari 400. Since those early days I have owned many computers and consoles, all the way up to the present day with the latest generation of machines. My interest in the games of the past has been rekindled by your excellent magazine and I am seriously considering packing away my Xbox 360 and PSP and getting my old Atari 800XL or Mega Drive out of their boxes and going through the old games that haven't seen the light of day for many years. In fact I have also been

trawling the Internet looking to buy an Amiga 500, which I foolishly sold to help finance buying a PC when I started University.

Thanks again for this nudge in the right direction and keep up the good work – I for one cannot wait to get my hands on next month's issue.

Joel Waxman, via email

Glad you're enjoying the magazine Joel and that you're willing to go back to your old machines. Be like us though and get everything out there (we'd be lost without 360's Oblivion*). A healthy diet of classic and current gaming is just the thing to stay a healthy gamer.*



» The Atari 800. It's no Xbox 360 but both consoles deserve to sit side by side in any gamer's collection.

CRY FOR SSI

Dear Darran,

I have been reading Retro Gamer regularly for a year or so now, and I truly enjoy it. Finding it has become a bit hit-or-miss here in the United States recently, but the search is always worth the effort. For me, my happiest memories of gaming involve the Commodore 64 in the mid Eighties, the Amiga in the early Nineties, and, above all, my beloved Atari ST in the late Eighties.

I must, though, speak out against the unfair and untrue accusation uttered by Tim Chaney in your excellent US Gold feature. The games of Strategic Simulations, Inc, better known as SSI, were certainly not "crap," as Chaney suggested. Quite the contrary, they were wonderful. *Colonial Conquest*, for me, is the third greatest game of all time, behind only *Alpha Centauri* and *Civilization II*. I also spent hundred upon hundreds of happy hours with *Phantasie*, *Sword Of Aragon*, *No Greater Glory*, *Rebel Charge At Chickamauga*, *President Elect*, *Rails West*, *Roadwar 2000*, *Cartels & Cutthroats* and many, many more.

Indeed, one of the saddest facts of being an Atari ST owner was the litany of conversions that SSI once planned, but later cancelled. I can only salivate at the thought of how great classic games like Imperium Galactum and Computer Ambush would have been played on the ST. Before you take me as a mad man with an unhealthy fondness of SSI titles, I would like to remind you that several SSI games were placed in Computer Gaming





EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST (OR FUNNIEST) REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE ASKED: IF YOU COULD BE A VIDEOGAME CHARACTER WHO WOULD YOU BE AND WHY?

ID: Ash
Mario of course. He's overweight, hairy and has poor fashion sense but still has about three girlfriends

ID: Mad Gerald:
Lara Croft. If I was her, I'd sit at home all day and play with myself too... On a console!

ID: duddyroar
Gotta be Strider Hiryu. Then I'd spend all day doing cartwheels in the air for no good reason

ID: DRS
Pac-Man. All those pills...

ID: LeeT
Rockford from *Boulderdash* – Diamonds are MY best friend!

ID: yakmag
Green Elf, coz then I'd be the first to get the food!!!

ID: drws
Mario – because he looks like Ron Jeremy

ID: Wil
The PiMan. That nose, it's hypnotic!

ID: rossi46
Ax Battler from *Golden Axe*. I'd get to wander about hacking at neds and chavs with a fu*k-off sword, then be congratulated for it

ID: cheeky_muffin
Spiky Harold – Think of all those apples to eat for a new healthy lifestyle, or the bloke in the *OutRun* car, what more could you ask for by having a fit blonde chick next to you?

ID: Dudley
The guy from *LittleComputerPeople*. I think I pretty much do all of that stuff anyway...

ID: The Hardest of All Freds
I'd like to be Lesiure Suit Larry. Suave, sophisticated and a hit with the ladies. All over-rated characteristics in my opinion. Larry is the man

ID: DonkeySpank
Kung Fu Master – exploding disco balls, a nasty man with a boomerang fetish and a licence to kick butterfly ass! What a Saturday night! – or – Mr. Do! Hey, he's cute! He's a clown! He's got an exploding ball and he likes the look of them apples! What more could a dwarf Ukranian circus refugee ask for? E-X-T-R-A!

ID: Mr. Pointless
The Ferrari driver in *OutRun*... A fast car and good-looking passenger bombing down the road in the summer... brilliant.

ID: Delboy
Guybrush Threepwood, would love to go on an adventure like that dude, become a pirate, drink grog, buy a boat, sail to monkey island, kill a ghost… Beats nine to five

ID: Forestville
I'd be god from populous (amiga) so I could control everything, and live on forever

ID: Playboy
I'd be Alex Kidd cos then I might be able to lay some demons to rest and actually complete the damn game. Even if I didn't I'd be a monkey boy living in a miracle world; what could be better than that? By the way does anybody know how you actually complete the stupid game… I'm sure mine was broken. Otherwise I just suck, monkey man or not

THE RETRO FORUM





» Is this one of SSI's greatest games? Carl Lund seems to think so…

World's Hall of Fame, no mean feat in itself, as at the time, hall of fame induction was contingent upon votes cast by the magazine's readers. I dearly wish that current games were as great and grand as SSI's glorious titles of old, surely they deserve a feature?

Carl Lund via email

Sorry you don't agree with Tim Chaney's opinion on SSI's back catalogue, but that's all it was and we're sure he didn't mean offence. You're right; SSI has quite an impressive back catalogue and is worthy of appearing in the magazine. There's something else to add to the 'to do' list…

MEMORY LOSS

Dear Retro Gamer,

I was wondering if you could help me?

I have two PC games that I am trying to track down, but can't remember their names. Both games were released around the time of *Little Big Adventure 1*, so they should have been available around 1994/95.

The first game reminded me of *Monopoly.* The game had very simple graphics and a group of people could race through the game and buy properties such as banks and zoos. I can't tell you much more, except that one of the characters controlled a big red zeppelin

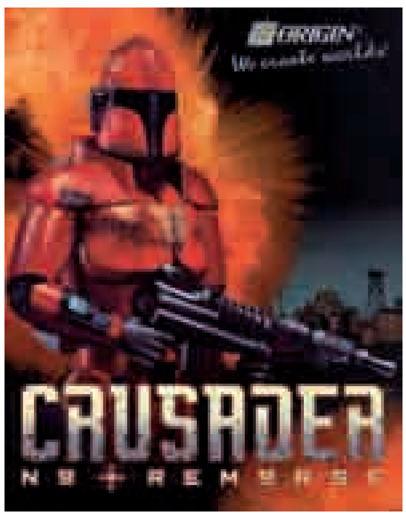
The other game was an action title that had you controlling a red robot with various different weapons. I believe you were walking in a factory and shot at other guarding robots that were patrolling and that you could make them burst in to flames. This game had the same camera view as in *Little Big Adventure 1* but of course much more detailed graphics.

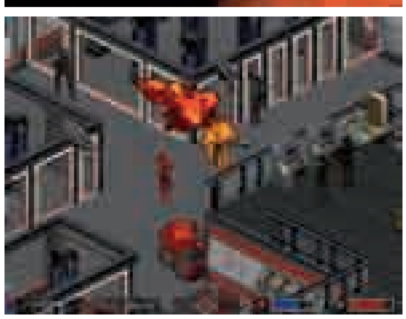
I hope you can help me because it's really hard to find out this sort of information when you don't know the names and aren't as experienced as yourself.

Please help me regain my childhood memories again,

Magnus, Sweden

Sorry Magnus, but we've no idea what the first game you're trying to track down is; it doesn't ring any bells with us at all. Perhaps one of our readers will be able to help you? As for your second game, we're pretty confident that it's Origin Systems' Crusader: No Remorse. *We've included a screenshot to help jog your memory. Good luck tracking down a copy.*





» **Top:** The striking box art from *Crusader*
Bottom: We hope this brings back the memories

CONTACT US

Snail Mail: Retro Gamer, Imagine Publishing, Richmond House, 33 Richmond Hill, Bournemouth, Dorset BH2 6EQ **Email:** retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

retro GAMER

Imagine Publishing Ltd
Richmond House
33 Richmond Hill
Bournemouth
Dorset BH2 6EZ
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Website: www.retrogamer.net

Thank you for supporting Imagine Publishing – a new independent specialist magazine publisher where quality, innovation and excellence are paramount. We hope you enjoy the magazine.

Retrobates

Editor in Chief
Simon Phillips
☎ 01202 586216

Editor
Darran Jones
☎ 01202 586237
retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Snr Designer
Sarah Bellman

Sub Editor
Luke Smith

Contributors
Mat Allen, Richard Burton, Matthew Cockburn, David Crookes, Ashley Day, Paul Drury, Craig Grannell, Archer Maclean, Shane R Monroe, Spanner, John Szczepaniak, Mike Tooley

Pictures
iStockphoto

Special thanks to…
Stephanie Moses, Tetris DS, lots and lots of coffee

Advertising
Digital or printed media packs are available on request.

Advertising Manager
Felicity Mead
☎ 01202 586221
felicity.mead@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Snr Advertising Executive
Mark Maclean
☎ 01202 586220
mark.maclean@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Advertising Sales Executive
Kaylie Green
☎ 01202 586298
kaylie.green@imagine-publishing.co.uk

International
Retro Gamer is available for licensing.
Please contact the International department now to discuss partnership opportunities.

International Manager
Cathy Blackman
☎ +44 (0) 1202 586200
Email: licensing@imagine-publishing.co.uk

Subscriptions
Subscribe to Retro Gamer today!
☎ +44 (0) 870 428 8359
Email: retrogamer@cisubs.co.uk
6 issue subscription (UK) – £15
13 issue subscription (Overseas) – £80

Circulation
Circulation & Export Manager
Darren Pearce
Tel: 01202 586200

Production
Production Director
Jane Hawkins
☎ 01202 586200

Founders
Managing Director Damian Butt
Finance Director Steven Boyd
Creative Director Mark Kendrick

Printed by
St Ives Andover West Portway
Andover SP10 3SF
Retro Gamer is distributed by Seymour Distribution, 2 East Poultry Avenue, London EC1A 9PT.
☎ 0207 3968000

ISSN 1742-3155

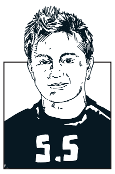
eMag

THE MUNCHER

MUNCH HOUSING SYNDROME



- **PUBLISHER:** GREMLIN GRAPHICS
- **RELEASED:** 1988
- **GENRE:** ARCADE
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** NOWT



HISTORY

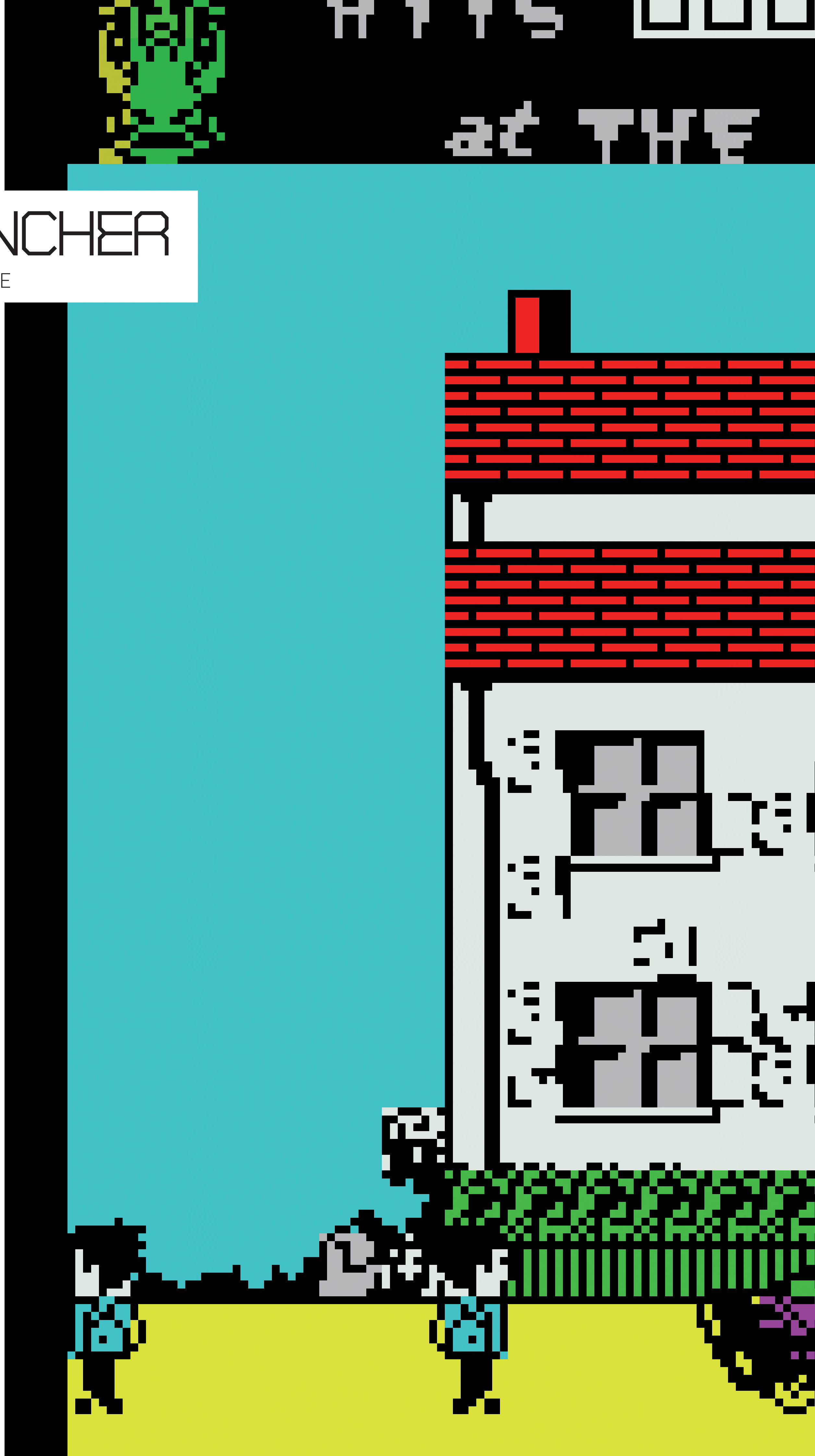
Also known as *The Muncher Eats Chewits* and, prior to any corporate endorsement, *T-Wreaks, The Muncher* was a 128k Spectrum-only (and C64) jaunt featuring the ten-storey radioactive relative of Yoshi from the sweets adverts of the late Eighties. In fact, the rampaging reptilian and the jolly, doe-eyed Jap-in-a-jumpsuit from the adverts are far removed from each other, but that extra bit of advertising oomph can't have hurt sales for either.

Striding majestically from the ocean after the atypical antagonist from all *Godzilla* movies – the scientist – stole five of the creature's eggs, it seems the only recourse left to the stalwart super-skink is to smash Japan until the hatchlings are recovered and nestled in the homely neon warmth of nuclear waste.

Not dissimilar to *Rampage* in premise, the gameplay of *The Muncher* makes for quite a different game. There are several destructive forces at your beck and call, such as thrashing your mighty tail, cleaving in twain with the six-foot serrations that make up your face, eating/interfering with innocent passers-by and finally the prerequisite defence mechanism of all mythical monsters: fire-breathing. The fuel supply of the latter is quickly exhausted, but can be replenished by consuming petrol wagons. Watch out for the water trucks, however, as devouring these will douse your incendiary wrath.

Other oversized denizens of the sea cross the Muncher's destructive path on his way to the army base, which, in true Japanese B-movie style, bring out the humanitarian side of our behemoth and beastly battle soon begins.

All product placements aside, *The Muncher* provides gamers with a highly enjoyable, massively devastating journey (although the controls are a bit clunky) with some of the largest, most colourful sprites ever seen on the Spectrum. *The Muncher* must have proven himself a money-making monstrous mascot over the years, as I saw his modern likeness still adorning the side of a packet of Chewits just the other day. I didn't buy any, though.




SEASHORE
65

TARGET: RENEGADE

Called back into 8-bit-only action by industry legends Ocean, Technos' hot blooded bad boy, the Renegade, once again made the streets unsafe for roaming gangs in the classic 1988 beat-'em-update, Target: Renegade. Programmer Mike Lamb and Ocean's head of development, Gary Bracey, told us about their work on the ass-kickin' in-house sequel.



"WHEN A GAME IS THIS WELL DESIGNED, THE PLAYER IS UNAWARE THAT ANY DEPTH OF EFFORT WAS EVER MADE" MIKE LAMB





Although the fighting genus appears, superficially, to be constructed from a limited extraction, successfully creating a healthy pedigree is no small task. It requires an oblique ingenuity to effectively repackage the same, well-trodden premise into a structure that will appeal to stalwart fans.

When Technos' perennial gang-fighting extravaganza, *Nekketsu Kouha Kunio-Kun* was released, the slick veneer made it instantly accessible to the jaded Japanese arcade goer. Its quality found in the surplus of well-conceived designs and back breaking effort from the developers, with no call for players to add their own strength to the game's already muscular whipping arm. The hard work was done, and all that was left was to enjoy the game. Likewise, when the machine left its native shores, an extra round of laborious redesign was applied to transform the game into *Renegade*, infusing the same, culturally relevant undercurrent that brought about its much deserved merit.

Renegade's hugely successful 8-bit conversion then marked a turning point in the suffering reputation of renowned software house, Ocean. Mike Lamb, game designer and programmer of *Renegade* (and its continuation), told us about his work-life on the run up to the smash sequel.

"When I first got to Ocean, they had a reputation for buying a big licence and making a crap job of the game. Gary Bracey, the development manager, had been hired and told to get some good people in to turn things around. Most of us were new to Manchester, so we hung out a lot together after work. It was a cool group. Manchester in the Eighties was a very happening place.

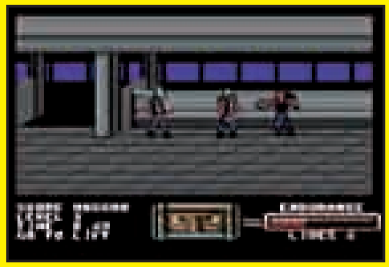
There was a fair bit of competition amongst the programmers to do one better than the next guy and I think it really helped the games. Gradually Ocean's reputation turned around and I'd say, for the most part, we all felt pretty good about what we were doing." remembers Lamb.

When granted the freedom to build on his hugely successful conversion of the original coin-op, Mike and his team followed the example set by the Japanese by employing the same diligent, yet transparent, background industry when expanding the world of the vengeful vigilante.

The two player co-operative beat-'em-up was at its zenith, and was a natural progression which the 8-bit fighting fans were crying out to see on their home machines. Gary Bracey told us about the evolution of the franchise.

"Ocean was known predominantly for conversions and movie licences. It was rare to create a totally original game in-house, and that was very satisfying to everyone involved. It was my job at the time to choose the developers/teams and approve design concepts and graphics. However, the developers and artists we had working on *Target: Renegade* were some of the best in the business and I knew the result would be excellent. These were not people you had to stand watch over every hour. They were pretty much given the freedom to invent the game from the ground up."

Ocean had been outbid for the much anticipated *Double Dragon* licence which,

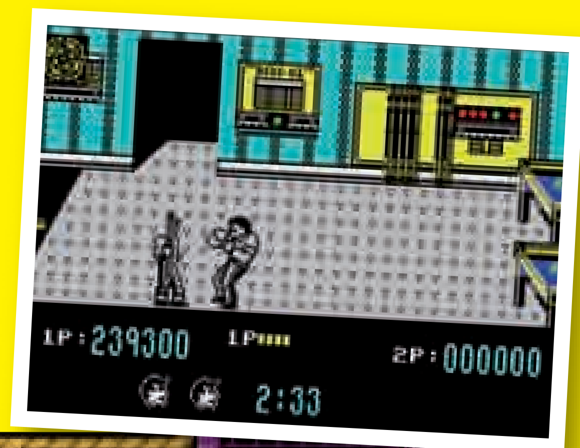


» The C64's *Renegade* bore a striking resemblance to the new look, long-haired Vietnam vet from 1988's *Rambo 3*

when it arrived from Melbourne House, cast an insipid pall over its majestic arcade ancestor. The *Renegade* follow up couldn't have come at a better time to counterbalance *Double Dragon*'s categorical failure. Mike was a fan of Technos' arcade half-sequel to *Renegade*, and drew on its prowess when updating his original conversion.

"Rather cleverly, Ocean had written the rights to make a sequel to *Renegade* into the original licensing contract. *Renegade* had been very well received and Ocean wanted to cash in. It got a copy of the arcade *Double Dragon* game and we all got to work.

We had a couple of preliminary meetings to work out what the levels were going to be and what characters would be in them. The game itself wasn't



» Mr Big – the end boss and cheeky likeness of Ocean's MD, Jon Woods

IN THE KNOW

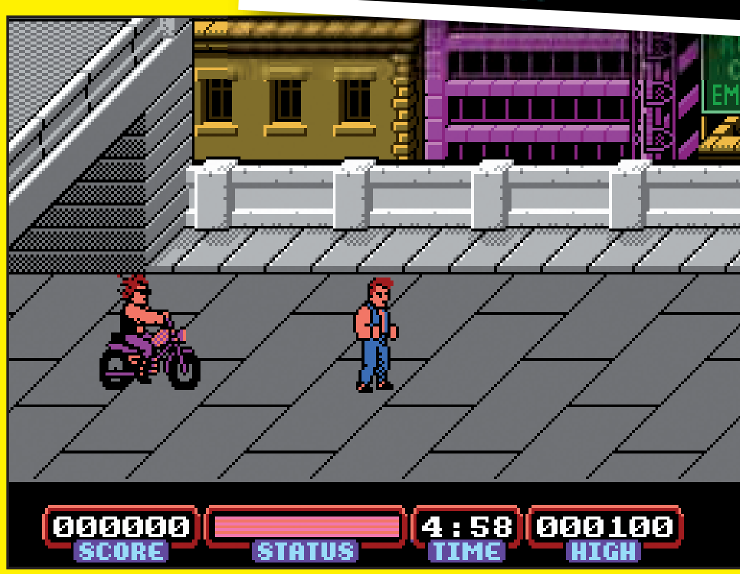


» **PUBLISHER:** OCEAN/IMAGINE
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **GENRE:** BEAT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** 'NOWT





» As far as Mike Lamb can remember, 'Rene' was graphic artist Dawn Drake's boyfriend



» In 1990, Taito released an NES version, which looked more akin to *Double Dragon*

THE MAKING OF...

TARGET: RENEGADE



RIGHT ON TARGET

Mike Lamb told us which version of *Target: Renegade* he thought hit the gold. "The Spectrum was definitely my favourite. When we made *Target: Renegade*, in order to make the game better we were going to have to use a full 48k per level. 128k machines were more popular by then, but in order to accommodate 48k owners, we wanted to make the levels longer so the tape loading wouldn't be so intrusive.

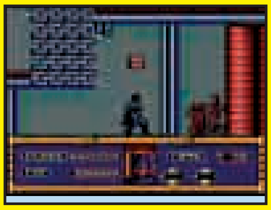
After Christmas, Dawn and I got to work on the Amstrad version. I came up with an idea to use four colour sprites to save memory. It was a good idea technically, but although the game was fun to play, the graphics suffered in comparison to the original *Renegade*. The C64 hardware didn't really suit a game like *Target: Renegade*. The limitation on how many sprites you could fit on a scan line restricted what could be done in terms of gameplay a lot."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BATMAN – THE MOVIE
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

ARKANOID
SYSTEM: AMSTRAD CPC, ATARI 8-BIT, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987

COMBAT SCHOOL
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC, C64 & ZX SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1987



"IT WAS BASICALLY GOING THROUGH VARIOUS LANDSCAPES BEATING THE CRAP OUT OF EVERYBODY" MIKE LAMB

particularly original in design. We copied the two-player idea and weapons from *Double Dragon*. There wasn't a whole a lot of back story – it was basically going through various landscapes beating the crap out of everybody.

Jon Woods (Ocean's MD) came up with the idea of using a telephone at the end of each level. "I guess he'd been watching *Dirty Harry*." laughs Lamb, modestly making light of his impressive achievement.

Despite Mike's assertions that *Target: Renegade* was not an original idea, the fact remains that its timing was impeccable, and he and his team had created a game that resonated profoundly with the starving beat-'em-up fraternity. There were no flashy hot-rods in the protagonist's garage, and no ornate super villain hideouts to penetrate. *Renegade*'s journey was through a deprived inner-city scenario; an axiom of Eighties social decay that players not only identified with, but also lived on, walked through and suffered everyday.

This candid snapshot of urban life not only served to draw players into the *Renegade*'s world (or more accurately, place him in theirs), but delivered a 2-dimensional realisation of a guttural, often repressed – and yes, somewhat juvenile – fantasy harboured by every beat-'em-up fan; the fearless ability to answer the criminal class in kind. The mean streets of Scumville that so expressively reflected recession-fraught Britain was a place where the player no longer had to fear the hostile gangs who patrolled local parks, or avoid the shadowed threat of the multi-storey car park. Any aggression could be met with an equally adept malevolence, the failure of law and order replaced by the brutal, dispassionate justice of an urban-jungle.

"The design of the characters and backgrounds was mostly the work of the artists. Ron Fowles, the spectrum *Renegade* artist, had left and I was lucky enough to work with Dawn Drake. Martin MacDonald (the C64 artist) and Dawn collaborated a good deal on the graphics. I can't exactly remember who came up with what. The gameplay was mostly left to me, but Dawn and Martin were good about taking suggestions and I listened to their ideas too. Martin made the boss in the pool hall a rather good caricature of Jon Woods (the Ocean boss). We didn't have a lot of contact with him and everybody was a little scared of him. He was cool about it though." Mike explains about the construction of the *Renegade*'s hometown and its disreputable occupants.



» That's using your head



» Burying the hatchet with the gang in the park. Let's all be friends, eh?

He continues, "They came up with pretty much all the characters. Dave Collier wrote the C64 version, and most of the gameplay that I didn't come up with came from Dawn and Martin. Gary Bracey was good for suggestions."

Gary told us about his involvement in realising the inspired project; "Unlike today, the people who designed the games were the same people who developed them – both programming and graphics. Therefore, they had perfect knowledge of the respective restrictions of the platforms and how much those limitations could be stretched.

As for the title, I think I may have come up with that one. I don't recall there being any other serious suggestions." Gary's name for the sequel trips lightly off the tongue after almost 20 years of repetition, but if we look closely, it serves the critical post a title must fulfil rather adroitly.

The back story to the original was built around the kidnapping of a vengeful malcontent's girlfriend, and his merciless retribution. The sequel's tale, as dictated

» His work done, the C64 *Renegade* stopped off for a quick one in the bar he just wreaked. Arseholing thugs is thirsty work, you know





» *Combat School* – another successful Mike Lamb production







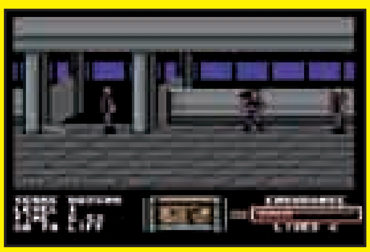
» The Amstrad version of Target: Renegade in all its colourful glory

by the concise title, tells a story of vengeance moving in the opposite direction. The disgraced criminal hordes must reclaim their dubious honour by defeating the Renegade once and for all; he (and his twin) are the sole target of the gang's violent malice, with no ulterior intentions to destroying our hero. Summarising an entire back story into a two word title is immensely difficult, but vitally important when it comes to selling the game to the correct, window shopping audience. Gary's choice accomplished this perfectly.

Much of what made *Renegade* popular wasn't found in *Double Dragon*, but this direct sequel made a special effort to retain the characteristic style that permeated the raw, corrosive, underworld texture of the original. The reckless bikers, the unscrupulous gunman, the treacherous streetwalkers and the twisted pain junkies were all back, ready to turn their sadistic talents on anyone who passed their way. Likewise, the *Renegade*'s own techniques returned to an unrefined street style rather than a restrained martial system; self taught and without clemency, the ultimate 'style of no style'. Just because an enemy lay unconscious after being kicked off a moving motorbike didn't make them any less of a target, and neither was a sledgehammer an unfair adversary to fragile ribs. A properly realised differentiation between a rescue mission and a desperate battle for survival is one of the fundamental, veiled nuances that great beat-'em-ups use to stand out from the crowd, and *Target: Renegade* can lay claim to providing a text book example of how this was done.

Gary Bracey confirmed that the reputation of the original classic was always a sincere consideration when developing its sequel. "We felt that *Renegade* was such a huge and unexpected hit that we should have another go, this time being unfettered by the restrictions of producing a faithful conversion, whist keeping to the spirit – and control – of the original." And so they did – marking another successful revolution in Ocean's illustrious career, and a seminal moment in home computing and beat-'em-up history.

"During the 8-bit era, a lot of games weren't technically very well written. We always prided ourselves at Ocean on keeping the frame-rate up and squeezing as much as we could from the hardware. If something worked well first time, like *Target: Renegade*, it was a sure hit." explains Lamb.



» The C64 version may have impressed with its chunky visuals, but the lack of a second player was unforgiveable



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Renegade
Renegade 3: The Final Chapter

A defining moment in 8-bit brutality, *Target: Renegade* was a triumph of dedicated enterprise over commercial pandering, providing the raw meat that fans of the genre wanted, without the flavourless dilution required for general appeal. When a game is this well designed, the player is unaware that any depth of effort was ever made; they will simple love playing it, without questioning why.

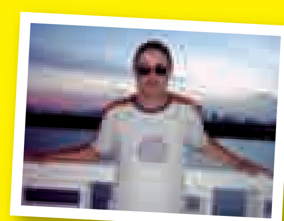
WOLF IN LAMB'S CLOTHING

Mike Lamb's father was a lecturer and gave him a book to learn BASIC on the resident Commodore PET at an early age. Having written a couple of games for the machine, he first found competition when the ZX Spectrum was released and a schoolmate wrote *Galaxians* for Artic Computing.

Mike bought a Spectrum. He was attending Cambridge and made a pool game inspired by an arcade machine. CDS Microsystems picked up his game in 1983, and soon commissioned a snooker game, featuring Steve Davis.

After University, Mike applied for a job at Ocean, where he created the classic conversion of *Renegade*, *Target: Renegade*, *Arkanoid*, *Batman – The Movie*, *Combat School* and more.

He moved to California to found a development company with, John Brandwood, the Amstrad Renegade programmer. Retired in Miami, Mike spends his time playing online poker, and despite some success, he's glad he doesn't have to live on his winnings!





» Jet Li's 2004 game *Rise To Honour* is a decent-ish update on the *Renegade* concept. Don't try this at home (try it outside)



» A pimp and his bitches out for a peaceful strol through the neighbourhood. We'll soon put a stop to that…

AN AXIOM OF EIGHTIES SOCIAL DECAY THAT PLAYERS NOT ONLY IDENTIFIED WITH, BUT ALSO LIVED ON, WALKED THROUGH AND SUFFERED EVERYDAY



Whatever happened to...

STARFOX 2

ARGONAUTS POLYGON PUSHING SUPERFX CHIP WAS AN UNRIVALLED SUCCESS STORY OF BRITISH INNOVATION AND DESIGN, WHICH IN COLLABORATION WITH NINTENDO RESULTED IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STARFOX. WITH SHIGERU MIYAMOTO AGAIN TAKING CONTROL FOR THE ANNOUNCED SEQUEL HOPES WERE HIGH FOR ANOTHER GRAND SPACE ADVENTURE. LATE IN DEVELOPMENT HOWEVER, WITH NINTENDO'S NEXT GENERATION N64 ON THE HORIZON THE PROJECT WAS FRUSTRATINGLY CANCELLED. WITH EXCLUSIVE DEVELOPER INSIGHTS INTO ITS DEMISE MATTHEW COCKBURN SUITS UP AND DELVES DEEPER

NEED TO KNOW

SYSYEM:
SUPER FAMICOM (SNES)

DEVELOPER:
NINTENDO/ARGONAUT SOFTWARE LTD

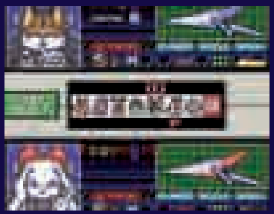
START OF DEVELOPMENT:
SUMMER 1993

DATE OF CANCELLATION:
SPRING 1995

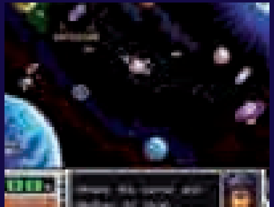
VERSION PLAYED BY RG:
FINAL BETA ROM (TRANSLATED VERSION)



» The Starfox mothership can be warped to any friendly planet giving a tactical advantage and is used to replenish shields



» Alternative pilots to Fox can be selected including two new arrivals Miyu the lynx and Fay the dog



» This map screen brings an element of real time strategy with freeform missions that evolve during battle sequences!

When *Starfox* was released in 1993 the Super FX-enhanced game immediately impressed gamers with its stunning visuals, gripping gameplay and operatic storyline. SNES owners duly lapped it up and while it can now be picked up for next to nothing, special editions like the *Starwing Super Weekend Competition* cartridge still sell for outrageous prices on the likes of eBay.

With its gorgeous panoramic landscapes and dynamic screen-filling boss-encounters it should have come as no surprise that Nintendo decided to plough ahead with development on a sequel, and this time it was going to make good with the few faults that the original game had suffered from – namely it's on-rails design. As *Starfox 2* lead programmer Dylan Cuthbert points out, *Starfox 2* was to be vastly different. "The *Starfox* franchise has never really been about shooting-on-rails, it's always been about giving the player a fun new 3D sci-fi experience," he insists. "It was originally put on rails simply because we didn't have the CPU power to populate a full 3D arena in enough detail." The second generation SuperFX chip was set to change all that and would provide the means to create a rich 3-Dimensional environment for the exciting and promising sequel.

Slowly, but ever so surely, a trickle of information and screenshots began to reach the media, with early prototype carts hitting tradeshows such as the LA-based videogame mecca E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo). Sadly, with all the excitement generated by the introduction of the new 32-bit consoles, interest in *Starfox 2* began to wane and by the 1995 CES (Consumer Electronic Show) Nintendo's sequel looked set to become another lost gaming relic.

THE BETA ROM

That was until an anonymous source approached key members of the emulation community, most noticeably one known as 'The Dumper'. "I was contacted discreetly by someone who had a non-working copy of what most people today refer to as the *Starfox 2* Final Beta ROM," he explains. "This was not a ROM dump but an image from one of the development environments of the game that had been found somewhere." Unfortunately, emulation of the ROM proved ropey at best, "this person thought that perhaps the reason it wasn't working was that emulation of the SuperFX chip wasn't complete and maybe I could help get it working," 'The Dumper continues.' "It only took a short time looking at the image to realise that a section was actually absent. An internal header in the middle of the ROM containing data such as the name, part number, checksums – it was this part that was missing."



» Andross makes a return in *Starfox 2*, despatching two Cannon Betrayers to do battle with Corneria



» The Mirage Dragon carries an awesome beam weapon inflicting massive shield damage alongside a fireball barrage

Inspired by the discovery of *Starfox 2*, emulation of the SuperFX chip advanced to the point where the ROM is playable in both ZSNES and Snes9x, although not without some drawbacks. For the best tactile feel and with the correct expertise it's possible to create working *Starfox 2* carts, something 'The Dumper' pleads guilty to: "The game looked so cool that I just had to build a proper cartridge for it. Of course, for a normal game this would have been relatively easy, but with *Starfox 2* this was no small undertaking. Luckily, the new assembly did all fit under the hood of a standard SNES cart. I plugged it into my SNES, flicked on the power and BAM, *Starfox 2*!"



» Andross barks orders to his Cannon Betrayers threatening Corneria with the planet cannon.



» Starfox triumph over Starwolf with another of their number reduced to dust.

TIME ATTACK

Through Emulation the Final Beta ROM opens with the Nintendo logo ablaze, with the camera panning across to the Corneria space-armada being torn apart by, the enemy, the Mirage Dragon. Summoned into service once again, Team Starfox warp their mothership into action where the menu screen greets you and the mission gets underway. It has three difficulty settings: Normal, Hard and Expert, each offering a varying level of challenge. Opting for the Normal mode presents you with two motherships from Andross' fleet called Cannon Betrayers and an equal number of planetary bases to defeat. Select the Expert level and Team Starfox is confronted with four Cannon Betrayers and three bases with a greater variety of enemies – from mine layers, to missiles of exotic design to destroy, before moving onto the final battle with Andross. The variation in each level is not limited to an increase in enemy numbers, however, as the environment/puzzles become more diverse. A challenge mastered in normal mode becomes quite a different beast on the expert setting.

After selecting a difficulty level you'll discover two new members of Team Starfox, Miyu and Fay, each character offering different strengths and weaknesses through the various craft they fly. They show variations in speed/agility, shield strength and possess an assortment of special weapons. After selecting one pilot along with a wingman you're shown the map screen where you learn that defending Corneria from the invading forces is your primary mission. Here an element of strategy is introduced: do you destroy the base firing the missiles or the Cannon Betrayer launching waves of fighter squadrons? This is where *Starfox 2* really shines – even during battle sequences time is a crucial factor. Take too long in a dogfight and that missile which had started two systems away can get uncomfortably close…

This evolving interplay of time and strategy is key to the gameplay of *Starfox 2* and was intended to offer a level of replayability – as Dylan elaborates, "In the real version, the timing and appearance of enemies was completely random. The point of *Starfox 2* was for you to replay the same mission repeatedly but to get a different experience each time – thus increasing the play-time enormously." Surprise is all part of the gameplay as demonstrated in the Final Beta ROM. Dealing with a squadron of enemy fighters the action can be interrupted by any number of factors, including Team Starwolf warping into the arena or the troublesome Mirage Dragon appearing, amongst a host of other unscripted events!



» As with Cannon Betrayers the core of a planetary base needs to be destroyed before the installation falls liberating the system

STEP IN THE RING

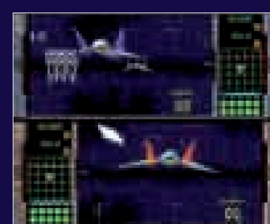
From a cockpit perspective space-warfare is frantic and engaging, drawing you deeper into the *Starfox* universe, with battle-chatter and reports popping up onto the HUD. The HUD is designed to avoid interference with gameplay. Contributing little to skirmishes the wingman acts as a form of in-game tutor advising you in tactical play or briefing the current mission. Outside of battle sequences the wingman can be interchanged for the main pilot bringing a fresh ship into proceedings and a different skill-set depending whom you selected at the start.

The freedom offered during dogfights is a welcome departure from the original and includes the option to morph into a walking Mech during land-based assaults. These ground levels introduce a basic but effective puzzle element, where you will need to explore the play area to activate switches or destroy shields before entering the base. Then you'll be navigating a typical corridor-style maze in pursuit of the core, which must be destroyed to liberate the planet from Andross' occupation and to stop the launch of further missiles destined for Corneria. Dylan gives his insight, "There was a lot of experimentation that went into *Starfox 2* where we had a robot walker and platforms you could jump onto and between. Collision detection was quite advanced for the time. We tried out a great many ideas; there were probably three or four versions of the arena-based play until we decided on the main type, and then we re-used the ideas from our experiments in the dungeons – ie. the base part of the stage." This shift in gameplay was a conscious decision for the sequel: "There were a few bosses built into the dungeons, but they were more gimmicky or puzzle-based than before; that part of the game had similarities to *Zelda*. *Starfox 2* was less of a shooting game in comparison to all the bosses in the original *Starfox* which were shooting-game type bosses".

With the explosive on-screen action and from the first rumblings of the Cannon

TWO'S COMPANY

The Final Beta ROM is not the only version of *Starfox 2* available, with several early builds leaked. Inevitably these consisted of debug menus and sparsely populated landscapes. One example includes a two-player mode: implementing a split-screen window this offered versus matches against a human opponent in various arenas including Ground, Space and Desert environments. Dylan elaborates on the decision to cut this feature, "We couldn't get the frame-rate good enough for it to feel like a rich level. The dogfight worked but the 1Vs1 mode wasn't that much fun. For the N64 they managed to get four players working and that made a big difference."



» Two-player mode was dropped in favour of the richer environments offered through the main single-player game

"A LOT OF THE EXPERIMENTATION WE DID FOR STARFOX 2 HELPED MIYAMOTO FORM IDEAS FOR MARIO 64" DYLAN CUTHBERT, LEAD PROGRAMMER



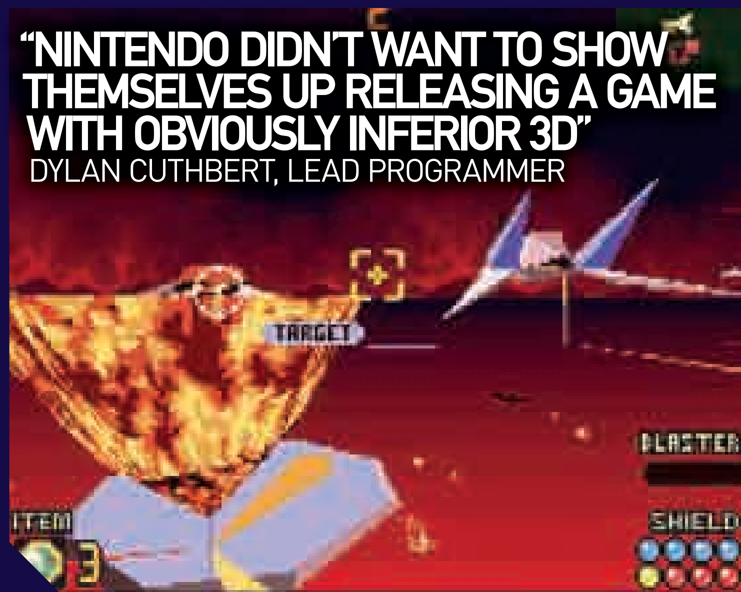
» Andross' forces prevail with the destruction of Corneria

Whatever happened to...

STARFOX 2



» The stomping block was alive and well before *Mario 64* and just goes to show how *Starfox 2* influenced the development of Miyamoto's masterpiece

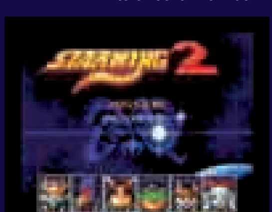


"NINTENDO DIDN'T WANT TO SHOW THEMSELVES UP RELEASING A GAME WITH OBVIOUSLY INFERIOR 3D"
DYLAN CUTHBERT, LEAD PROGRAMMER

» Introducing puzzle elements your Arwing needs a perfect landing on this moving platform to avoid the lava flows running beneath

TRANSLATION PATCH

A translation patch for the prototypes ROM can be found through Aeon Genesis (http://agtp.romhack.net) converting the Japanese to English. The project took over 100 hours of work, Gideon curator of AG recounts, "Four people were involved in the production of the English version: Myself as lead hacker, whose focus was text-dumping and replacement with some low-level assembly work, d4s as an assembly-level hacker and graphic artist, FuSoYa as the resident compression guru, and status on the translation of the actual text". The team released a second patch removing debug information and fixing menu screens. Gideon gives an example, "The most interesting aspect of the debug patch was allowing Corneria to take damage. All of the routines were in place to allow this, but it was multiplying the resulting number by zero, nullifying any damage that the planet would take. It was a simple matter of changing that multiplier into another number".



» Only the German translation patch features a renamed *Starwing 2* logo, rumours of hidden *Starfox* beach towels go unconfirmed!

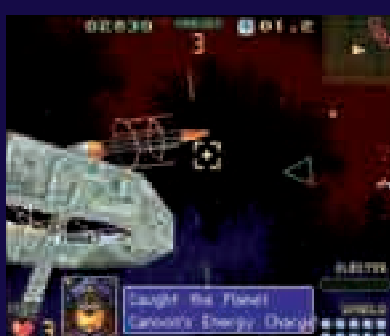
Betrayers engines you know *Starfox 2* is going to be an audio/visual spectacle. As gameplay shifts from menus and map-screens to battle scenarios, the music plays seamlessly and even offers audio cues, including a well implemented frenetic tone of urgency following any damage to Corneria. The trend of audio association continues with intrusions of Team Starwolf, to the deployment of the devastating Planet Cannons. The composition is flawless from the introductory sequence to the ending credits; everything fits perfectly and truly suits the space opera that is *Starfox 2*.

OUT FOXED

Revolutionary to the SNES, *Starfox 2* couldn't compete with the new 3D games at that time. Dylan reflects, "The rate at which 3D technology was developing was just too fast. Whilst we were making *Starfox 2* the PlayStation and Saturn had launched. Nintendo didn't want to show themselves up releasing a game with inferior 3D, especially as the original *Starfox* had been leagues ahead of the competition."

Whilst it's common knowledge that certain elements made it over to the N64 reincarnation of the series in *Starfox 64* (*Lylat Wars* in Europe), probably less well known is the fact *Starfox 2* provided vital experience for the production of 3D games. Dylan adds, "Miyamoto and Eguchi wanted to experiment with a deeper platformer/*Zelda* like experience. A lot of the experimentation we did for *Starfox 2* helped Miyamoto form ideas for *Mario 64*." While solace can be taken in the fact it helped mould one of the greatest games ever created in *Mario 64*, it's a shame that the masses never got to enjoy *Starfox 2*. A true realisation of the SuperFX chips power, it was far superior to the original, combining typical *Starfox* action with an RTS element that was poised to invigorate the franchise.

As Argonauts SuperFX technology opened up new possibilities it also sealed the fate for the doomed *Starfox 2* project, confronted with 3D visuals from other consoles outstripping that of the augmented SNES. Thanks to the continued support of the emulation community from projects such as Aeon Genesis, it's possible to get a glimpse at these hidden gems and enjoy the gaming experience as it was intended to be. The *Starfox 2* Final Beta ROM feels and plays like a finished game and can easily be found on-line if one were so inclined. Both ZSNES and Snes9x are happy to play the ROM; alternatively you could build your own *Starfox 2* prototype cartridge where it's reported to run without fault on the original hardware! Well worth further investigation, the game never fails to surprise and is one of the few gaming relics to be unearthed and given a new lease of life.



» After falling under Andross' control the Cornerian defensive satellite cannon takes aim as you attempt to regain control..



» Sucking on the exhaust fumes in hot pursuit of an enemy missile, the action never eases off in *Starfox 2*!



» *Starfox 2* box art featured in a US electronics boutique ad, it's rumoured full-scale billboard ads were distributed to retailers

SPECIAL THANKS

Thanks go to Evan for use of the gimped Starfox 2 box art, check out http://snescentral.edgeemu.com for more SNES oddities. With special mention of *Starfox* Fans http://www.starfoxfans.com worth a browse for tradeshow event pictures of *Starfox 2* and more besides.

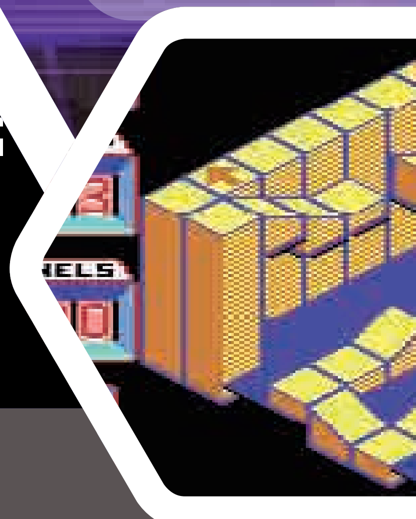
eMag

DEVELOPER LOOKBACK



Activision is one of the few golden-age publishers still in existence, but the company today is a million miles away from that conceived by four guys from Atari more than 25 years ago. Mat Allen takes a look at the whos, whys and wheres of a publishing pioneer.





October 1st 1979. The day the videogame publishing industry changed forever with the creation of the first third-party company. "When you bought a company's games machine, you bought games from the manufacturer," states Dave Crane. That was no longer the status quo. Crane, along with Bob Whitehead, Alan Miller and Larry Kaplan were responsible for founding Activision, though it would be a few months until consumers heard about them. But why would four designers from the world's most famous and lucrative videogame company up-sticks and leave?

All four of them had joined Atari within a few months of each other either side of Christmas 1976, hired to produce games for the upcoming 2600 console released in October 1977. Over the next two years, their output was to form a notable proportion of the 2600's catalogue that included *Combat*, *Air/Sea Battle*, *Outlaw*, *Canyon Bomber*, and *Video Chess*. "We found a synergy between the four of us, we always went out to lunch together or whatever, and would talk about each other's games and help one another," recalls Crane.

Then towards the end of 1978, and possibly due to Crane's background in hardware, Crane, Miller and Whitehead were taken off game-making duties and switched to creating the OS for the new Atari 400/800 computer. It was also about this time that an infamous internal memo did the rounds. In an effort to improve output and revenue, marketing decided to let the designers know which games were or were not selling so they could focus more on the types that were performing.

"So we were looking at this memo," says Crane, "and that was the first time we saw that Atari had accrued $100m in videogame sales in one year. So we were looking at these games and started to tabulate them, and we saw that the four of us did this, this, this [and so on], and we accounted for 60% of Atari's sales. We then tallied the rest, and found 20% were from people who had already gone, already left Atari. We were accounting for $60m in sales, and drawing $30k salaries."

Miller continues the tale, "During that time I began to reassess what I wanted to do at Atari. One of the things we wanted was recognition for our work, like anyone else in the entertainment industry, having our name on the product in question. So I approached management about that opportunity and the others joined me later on, and management said 'No, no recognition'. And that was pretty much the end of my time there."

At that time Ray Kassar was CEO of Atari, and one of the changes made during his tenure was the company consideration of games as mere product rather than a creative process, something that irked Crane especially. These meetings with Kassar are also reputedly the source of the now legendary quotes "you programmers are a dime a dozen" and "you are no more important that the man in the assembly line putting the games together".

"Part of starting Activision was that we wanted to work at a company that respected the industry, and was capable of working in the industry. All the signs were that was declining at Atari. So we were almost forced out of the company," concludes Miller. "Joe

IN BRIEF

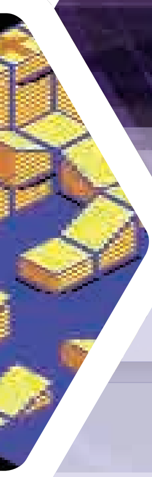
Activision was founded in 1979 by four designers at Atari who became disillusioned with the way things were working inside the company and decided to go it alone. Their success was to inspire the creation of countless other companies in the following years including Imagic, Spectravision and Commavid. Unlike many of its successors, Activision survived the videogame crash and flourished, but eventually succumbed to bankruptcy in 1992. Its subsequent resurrection makes it one of the oldest videogame companies today.











DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

ACTIVISIONARIES

Decuir [co-designer of the VCS and 400/800] had just left to start his own company. We asked which attorney he had used, and the four of us went there about starting our own company. There we were told that we would need an experienced management person in order to raise capital and so on."

This experienced management person was Jim Levy, who joined them as CEO and President in the process of what would eventually become Activision. "Levy came from a record industry background and understood the marketing and promotion of artists as well as products. So the videogame business went from absolutely zero designer credit to something approaching rock star promotion."

THE GENESIS OF A COMPANY

Why the name 'Activision' though? It's certainly better than 'VSync Inc', the first choice and almost registered suggestion. Following a large brainstorming session the final name was decided upon, a supposed amalgam of 'activity' and 'television'. There was one other important reason: Activision would hence be listed before Atari in the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) book. This is also the reason why later spin-off companies Accolade, Acclaim and Absolute were so named. One-upmanship indeed.

The four designers left Atari in autumn 1979 and formed their new company with $100k venture capital and $500k in loans soon after. Money was never the problem here; it was always going to be Atari itself. "We were told that the day we opened our door would be the day that Atari would sue us," recalls Crane. He wasn't wrong. Activision had already sought legal advice by this point. "One of the things Aldo Test [a well known patents lawyer] told us to do was not take anything with us; this included intellectual properties, so we didn't. All we left with is what was in our heads."

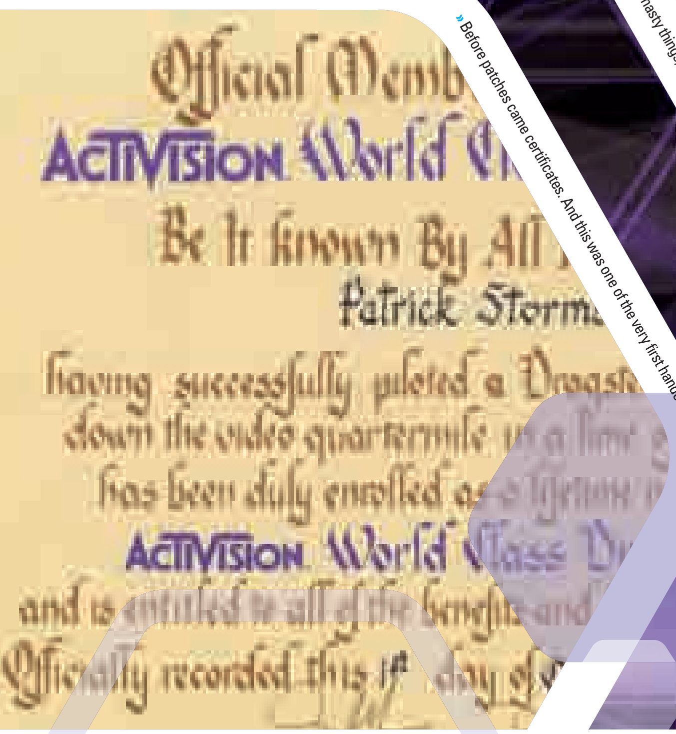
"I remember the first trade show we turned up at, which would have been January 1980. This was when Atari ran a full-page ad in the brochure stating that they condemned anyone who stole trade secrets. I remember Levy reading that and saying he agreed with everything they said. We hadn't done anything like that, but from the start, they [Atari] were trying to squash us as best as possible."

Over the next two years, Atari bringing cases against Activision would be a regular event. Activision even went as far as having a legal budget set aside to deal with this. The major issue was that of the skills learnt on the job (i.e. programming the 2600) and then being used elsewhere. This is what Atari had referred to as "trade secrets".

Probably the most infamous was regarding the "Venetian blinds" technique. Invented by Whitehead as a way to get eight objects on a line for *Video Chess*, it was the subject of attention even though, at the time, no Activision game had used it. In response, "I produced a demonstration of a real set of Venetian blinds. Is this what you mean?" chuckles Crane. Needless to say Atari's lawyers were not best pleased and carried on. Atari lost that action, and by the end Activision had won or settled every suit levelled against it.

THE GENESIS OF A GAME

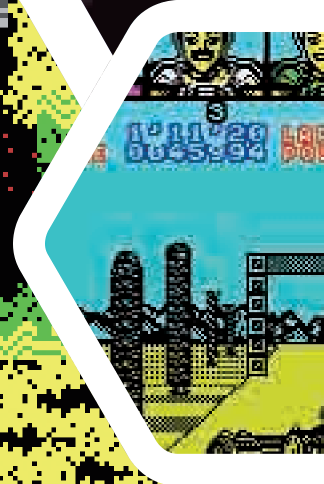
Activision's creation was made public in April 1980 with the first



» Before patches came certificates. And this was one of the very first handed out



» Blast nasty things, blow stuff up, rescue people. All in a day's work for a hero





» **Below:** The usual suspects lined up at CGE 2004 (from left): Dan Kitchen, Gary Kitchen, Dave Crane and Bob Whitehead

sniff of games appearing at the Chicago CES in June. The launch titles that were released the following month were *Dragster*, *Boxing*, *Checkers* and *Fishing Derby*, and all saw healthy sales figures; Activision's turnover for the year exceeded $60m. With the average game development taking six to nine months however (and with an attitude of "release it when it's ready"), it became apparent during 1981 that more designers were needed to bolster the output. Steve Cartwright became the first new designer to join and would go on to produce memorable games such as *Megamania*, *Plaque Attack* and *Hacker*. Other notables such as Carol Shaw and Matthew Hubbard followed him over the next year.

Most interesting of the new recruits was the programming team headed by Gary Kitchen over in New Jersey that joined in June 1982. Kitchen recalls, "After playing *Skiing*, I called up Activision and asked for the head of product development, and got the guy. We were on the East Coast doing 2600 games, which was a surprise to him because we hadn't come out of Atari and as far as he knew, there was no development on the East Coast. I had back-engineered the 2600 and had started to write some games; I had just finished writing 2600 *Donkey Kong* for Coleco at the time which made his ears perk up."

"So we flew out there to meet the gods [the Activision guys] and to break the ice they had a 2600 on the table. Alan took out *Ice Hockey*, put it in and asked if anyone wanted to play. So Dan, who was the player, took the control and beat the hell out of Al. And at that point, we were in!" Crane laughs "We knew we had to grow the company more, but to do that and have a big bunch of people together would have screwed things up, but to have these guys 3000 miles away was ideal!" This new development team included not only Gary's brothers Dan and Steve, but also John van Ryzin who would later develop the classic *H.E.R.O.*

Kitchen's group had already been interviewed by Atari at that point, "but the synergy and atmosphere of Activision appealed more." It might have also had something to do with being told by the vice-head of product development at Atari that he could "put crap in a box and sell quarter of a million copies". This was just after the release of *Pac-Man* and Kitchen was in the mood to let him know exactly what he thought of the "quality" of said game!

"We really did care about quality," says Crane. "At Atari we had three fully developed videogames that when we sat down and played them, they weren't good enough and they sat on the shelf, and never went out. There was one I kept going back to over and over again, trying to figure out how to make it fun." Lack of knowledge of the development process had been one other reason for leaving Atari, as later witnessed by several major wrong decisions at the company. Atari at that point seemingly was more concerned with getting the product out and selling, regardless of whether it was good or not.

"There was also the video aquarium, which for the longest time Dave tried to turn into a videogame…" recalls Miller. Crane remembers all too well. "*Fishing Derby*! People would walk into the lab and become mesmerised by these fish swimming about on the

"OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, ATARI BRINGING CASES AGAINST ACTIVISION WOULD BE A REGULAR EVENT. ACTIVISION HAD A LEGAL BUDGET TO DEAL WITH THIS"

PATCHED PRODUCTS

Aside from cries for help or good old-fashioned praise, there was also another reason for the vast flood of letters heading Activision's way. No one is sure who exactly came up with the idea, but the company introduced an achievement program during the pre-crash times whereby sending in a picture showing you had bettered a certain time/score (listed in the manual of each game) would result in an iron-on patch being sent in return. Most games had patches available to earn; some of these are beautiful to look at, and almost all are highly prized today.

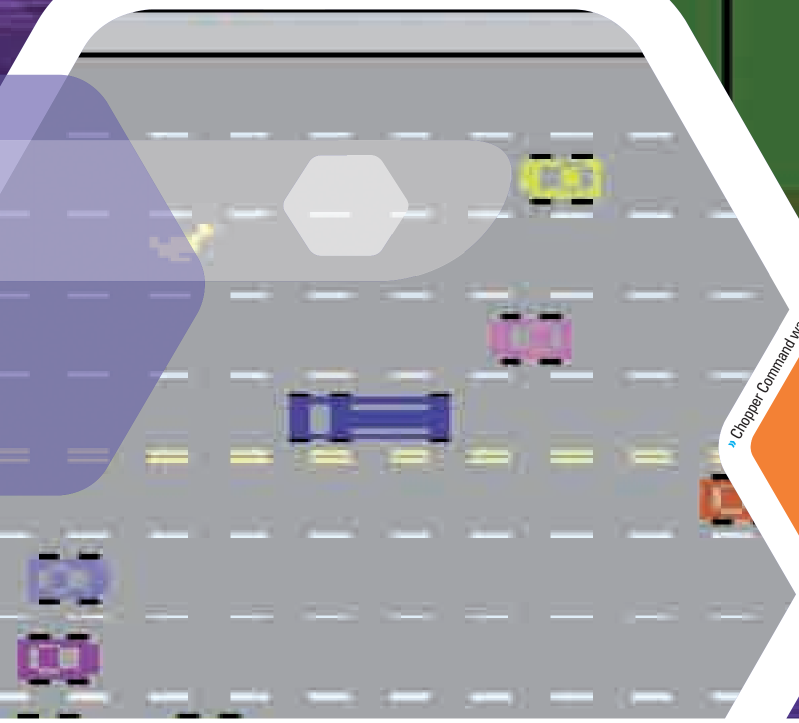
Activision also received many heart-rending pleas for patches over the million-point achievement on *Laser Blast*. Due to Dave Crane including a "quick start" option to restart the game once completed by tapping the stick to the side, the company got several letters from parents stating their kids had earned the patch and upon setting the stick down in readiness to take a picture, had nudged it slightly and reset the game! Out of compassion, Activision honoured all of these requests.





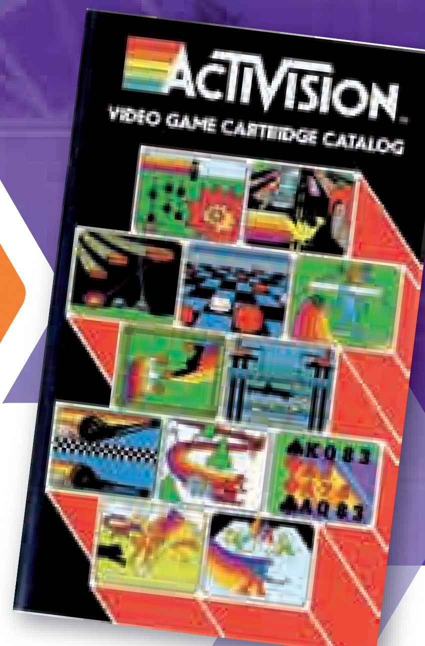
» How to piss off Atari's lawyers by making them look out of a window. Dave Crane's infamous "Venetian blinds"

» Not copied from *Frogger*. Swear, scout's honour truth



» *Chopper Command* was a great, frenetic blaster





» The front of an early Activision catalogue that used most of the early box artwork



» The back of the same catalogue, with the beaming faces of the designers for all to see

screen. I then made it into a fishing game using a fishing line, which was another technical achievement, but it still wasn't fun. It took Bob to step in and make a shark. He took the technology he had learnt from doing Boxing, and made a shark, so there was a threat." Miller concludes "That became a common phrase in the company after that, you had a mediocre game concept that was trying to be a game, people would say 'it needs a shark!'"

TECHNICAL INNOVATION

Technical achievements and new ways of doing things were often the driving force behind many Activision games. The six-digit kernel able, for example, to display scores up to a million, was an early development and first used in *Dragster* to display the race time. Impressive, given the technical limitations of the 2600, in the eyes of Crane who came up with it, "it became the most copied piece of code in 2600 history."

"So I would sit down and think what new thing I could do, for example the Grand Prix car, I was thinking about how to make a large object that was colourful and animated, I made the car and as soon as you have the side view of the car, then the road has to go this way. Quite often in my case a technical innovation drove me in the direction of a game, but everybody did it differently."

Whitehead was a big sports fan, and hence almost all of his output (including *Boxing*, *Skiing* and *Stampede*) was sport related. It's mildly ironic then that his biggest seller *Chopper Command* was not sports related at all, but based on *Defender*. Indeed a number of Activision titles had their roots in other games that were released at the time; *Megamania* was certainly a nod towards *Astro Blaster*, *Dragster* had been based on *Drag Race*, and *Star Master* was a heavy *Star Raiders* clone.

One of the most contentious titles was *Freeway*, often considered a blatant *Frogger* clone. According to Crane though, this is pure co-incidence, as the *Frogger* arcade was released within a month of *Freeway* hitting the shelves. "The idea for the game came from watching some poor guy trying to cross Lakeshore Drive in Chicago when I was on the way to the Chicago CES." Originally it did have human characters to control and little red splats when they were run over, but taste considerations caused them to be removed and the humans changed to chickens (as per the old joke).

Inspiration came from a number of different sources. Van Ryzin designed *H.E.R.O.* after visiting Howe Caverns in New York. Hubbard wrote *Dolphin* because he loved the animals and specifically tailored a key part of the game off audio cues, just like the animal would in real life. *Barnstorming* came from Cartwright seeing a biplane pulling a banner as he drove home one night soon after starting at Activision. These little things were often the genesis of a game idea, and the result was often a great game.

Adding to the game itself was the packaging used to house them. Activision's designs stood out from the more serious looking (at the time) Atari boxes, and it also later introduced screenshots on the back to give the prospective buyer an idea of what the game looked like. On top of this, the designers had their photo in the back of each manual along with some playing tips for better scores. Fame at last. As a side effect, it did also mean players could find which games they preferred and start buying others by that designer.

Although Activision was started as a way to separate their design skills out of the working environment of Atari, the nature of a growing company meant some parallels were eventually met. "There was always kind of a division, the lab and everyone else. It wasn't intended that way. We liked to work in a group, and if someone was like this [hunched] on their keyboard, then you didn't disturb them, but if they rolled back with their joystick, then you knew they were fair game. There was this non-verbal communication saying, "I'm busy" otherwise you could all chat. The ringers were taken out of the phones and



» The river of no return. Well it would be, you can't go backwards in the game

» He swings through the air with the greatest of ease. Probably the most well known Activision game artwork

had them flashing for example," remembers Crane. "In the end, we were behind this magnetically sealed door with a receptionist out front. In order to get in, you had to outrank her to enter. And that's part of the saddest thing about Activision, is that the need for privacy came to be interpreted as hushed voices when a designer walked through the lab. We didn't want distractions."

Kaplan retorts "It was also a way of keeping the marketing people out. Leave the people making the games alone to make the games." Crane laughs and responds, "The problem with marketing and research was judging what was hot today. Marketing would suggest a hot genre and we would turn around and ask them if it would be hot still in a year. That's the something that the marketing couldn't do, that we were doing pretty well. We were tired of the games that were already out there, so we were doing something new."

Activision at that time had no dedicated focus group, it relied on its own designers to come up with ideas and give internal feedback. "We didn't just target our games at 12-year-olds, we aimed our games at a much wider audience than that, and I don't think games companies today do that so much anymore." Miller states. "We designed games that we wanted to play, that were quick and easy to start and didn't need a 400-page manual to read." Miller would often be the main person in the early days doing the playtesting, as he was much better at it than anyone else.

They didn't always get it right first time. Until one week before deadline, Crane had only given the player one life in *Pitfall!*, but final playtesting from the others convinced him to make it the traditional three. *River Raid* was rejected after the first playtest; given the quality of the game this seems incredible, but after it gained popularity in-house, it was reassessed and given the green light.

With the success of the 2600 games, Crane was assigned to reverse engineer the Intellivision and Colecovision so that Activision could port games to it. Activision also started releasing cartridges for both the Atari XE/XL and 5200, but in many cases the games were little improved on their 2600 counterparts. Whereas the difficult task of writing games for the 2600 "was where the core group was needed instead" as it dominated the market, the actual ports themselves were left to other designers.

Evidently the public loved Activision as much as Activision loved programming. "Our games were very well accepted in the market from day one. At one time the staff hired to open mail told me that we were receiving 14,000 letters per week for *Pitfall!*. We had an entire division answering letters," chuckles Crane. "We did receive in the first six months one negative letter, it was a young boy writing from his bedroom and it said "I hate your games, I hate *Boxing*, the players look like lobsters." and the people opening the letters were wondering if they should show us this letter. They made that decision and a week later the same boy wrote back and he said he apologised for his previous letter; his mother had just sent him to his room and his new *Boxing* game was the only thing onscreen and he took it out on us guys. He did really like the game."

Activision was riding high. Then the crash happened, and despite diversifying onto other machines and continued critical acclaim, Activision was affected heavily along with every other publisher; at the end of the financial year 1984, the company posted an $18m loss. However there was a potential saviour on the horizon – the Commodore 64.

By this time, work had already begun on porting over many of the Atari hits such as *Pitfall!*, *Decathlon* and *River Raid* with the help of outside developers. There were also superb original games released such as *Toy Bizarre* by Mark Turmell (a terrific *Mario Bros* clone) and *Tony Ngo's Park Patrol* where you controlled a park ranger. However for Activision, 1984 belonged to just one game – *Ghostbusters*. Little has been made of the development process for the game, aside from some private discussion with Dave Crane in 2003. Until now that is, and you can read an in-depth article about the making of the game on page 56 of this very issue.

MASTER OF ACTIVISION

If there is one person you could name that is associated with Activision's games, it would have to be Todd Rogers. Not only has he maxed out or holds the world record for almost every single 2600 game the company released, he also holds the record for the arcade machine *Gorf* and has done a marathon run on the 2600 game *Journey Escape* of over 85 hours.

And it all started with *Dragster*. Dave Crane had written a computer program to simulate the theoretical fastest time the game could achieve, which turned out to be 5.54 seconds. In comes Todd with a submission of 5.51 seconds. Cue much scepticism. Until Todd reveals a flaw in Crane's program, he was popping the clutch into gear before the countdown hit zero, whilst the program was waiting until zero. To this day, Todd is still the only verified person to have achieved that time. Sensing talent when they saw it, Activision took Todd on tour as an example of a clean-cut gamesplayer, with the proviso of being paid to play and promote games. The rest, as they say, is history. You can read more about Rogers' *Gorf* achievement on page 106.



» If you got bored of the game, you could always sing along to the music

» One of Activision's more successful non-arcade machine licences

Ghostbusters was massive. And by massive, that is hundreds of thousands of copies massive, something unheard of at the time for a computer game. But despite that success, it wasn't enough to completely turn Activision's fortunes around and layoffs were inevitable by the end of the year. Those who could or would switch over to C64 development were seemingly kept on, with others (including Shaw and Hubbard) deciding either to leave or be made redundant. By the end of the year, Activision had pretty much ceased output for consoles. Curiously enough a few years later, when the 2600 experienced a mini-revival, Activision published a few more titles, most of which were co-ordinated by one or more people who used to work for the company years before.

GHOSTBUSTERS WAS MASSIVE. AND BY MASSIVE, THAT IS HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF COPIES MASSIVE, SOMETHING UNHEARD OF AT THE TIME FOR A VIDEOGAME

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

It was around this time that Miller and Whitehead decided to venture out with a new company called Accolade. "The reason we left is because we felt videogames had been in the doldrums for a few years and we felt there was an opportunity to make entertainment software for personal computers and sell it on floppy disk," Miller states. Their departure meant Crane was the only founding member left at Activision; Kaplan had left in 1982 shortly after completing *Kaboom!*, and would later work for other companies including Amiga and Silicon Graphics.

The following year, 1985, was to see the final vestiges of the old Activision disappear and a new direction take its place. Levy decided to purchase Infocom the text adventure giants, who were struggling financially after over-expansion and the underperformance of its Cornerstone product. However six months after this acquisition, Levy was replaced as CEO by Bruce Davis, who had a different idea about where to take the company. "Bruce Davis' biggest mistake was treating videogames as commodities, rather than creative products. I only mention this because it explains why I could no longer associate with the company," said Crane speaking to Gamasutra. Sounds eerily familiar doesn't it?

Davis is also blamed for running down Infocom over the next few years until it was wound up in 1989, and very few of the staff offered relocation to Activision's own headquarters. At around the same time in 1985, the East Coast group under Gary Kitchen ceased to be Activision employees and worked instead as freelancers, as it appeared to be one way of reducing the internal development costs. Kitchen's group would work with Activision for the next three years before eventually going solo under the name Absolute.

During all this upheaval in the United States, Activision was spreading its wings into Europe with offices created in the UK, Germany, France and Spain. Heading up the European operation was Rod Cousins, ex-Quicksilva MD who had left following disagreements within Argus Press after he had sold the company to them. He was hired mainly to change Activision's perception as merely selling American games. His creation of the Electric Dreams label was designed to export or create markets in other countries (especially the US) using UK based games.

It also became a haven for quirky and offbeat titles such as

R-TYPE VS. KATAKIS

One of Mediagenic's first decisions after changing its name was to acquire licences to convert some of the biggest arcade games out there, which included Irem's blockbuster *R-Type*. This prompted the next of its decisions, taking legal action against Rainbow Arts who were about to release its similar game *Katakis* in the UK. Poor Rainbow Arts were used to this by now, having also had its hit *Great Giana Sisters* pulled from shelves due to its similarity to *Super Mario Bros*. In the end, Rainbow Arts re-jigged the graphics slightly and released it as *Denaris* but the obvious homage was still present.

And the *R-Type* conversion itself? Karma comes to bite you in the backside every so often. The original development allegedly ran into issues, and so a new coding team was required at short notice. Enter Rainbow Arts stage right. Yes you got it right, the team Mediagenic had blocked from selling a clone was now going to code the real thing. However those damned short timescales came into play again, and given the less than two months Rainbow Arts had, the final result wasn't that bad. Naturally it could have been a lot better if it had longer to put it together.



» So stealthy, you didn't see it coming

» Your type

» To hark back to olden days when this was new and seemed like a one-off game

» Probably the best tribute to that fallen ship, certainly more than that god-awful film

LIFE IMITATING ART

Mention has already been made of Todd Rogers beating the theoretical best for Dragster. However it was soon Activision's turn to unleash a surprise for someone; that someone happened to be NASA. The game? *Space Shuttle*.

"The real shuttle used its large engines to de-orbit and its smaller ones for minor adjustments." Steve Kitchen, the designer of the game said at the time. "Our game worked the same way, but during the two years of game development and testing, someone accidentally landed using just the small engines." Thinking it was an error in his programming, Kitchen asked NASA to simulate the same event on their computers to see what the real results should be. "We were astonished," said Kitchen. "It did it on their computer too." Despite Kitchen not claiming any credit as such, an emergency procedure on how to land using just the small engines was introduced as part of the real shuttle's instruction manual.

Spindizzy, *Mermaid Madness*, *Chameleon* and the re-release of Automata's *Deus Ex Machina*. This gave Activision the opportunity to then start publishing for the UK's other two major formats, the Spectrum and Amstrad. "What's right for one country is not right for another. I see the group growing in general, contracting in publishing, financing a number of development houses' quality products," Cousins said at the time. Activision had already done this by publishing the early Lucasfilm titles in the UK (Epyx had published them in the US), and Interplay's superb text adventures. The major deal within the UK was to link with System 3; Activision distributed the first two *Last Ninja* games and *IK+*, and published all three games in the US.

As well as publishing games for other companies, Activision's output in the mid-Eighties matured, and is notable especially for many pieces of innovative software, mainly due to the freedom that the Commodore disk drive allowed. *Little Computer People* (or *LCP*) was covered in Retro Gamer issue #18 for example. Then there was *Alter Ego*, *Portal*, *Gamemaker*, *Sailing*, *Hacker*… the list goes on. But what Crane saw at Atari was about to happen at Activision too.

From the Softography, it's easy to spot the trend for licensed products starting in 1986. Many of Activision's early arcade conversions were of variable quality, a trend that was to continue over the next few years. Highlights include *Enduro Racer* on the Spectrum, *Ninja Spirit* and *Powerdrift* on the C64, and *Atomic Robokid* over most formats, but many of the others can be ignored outright.

THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL AND REBIRTH

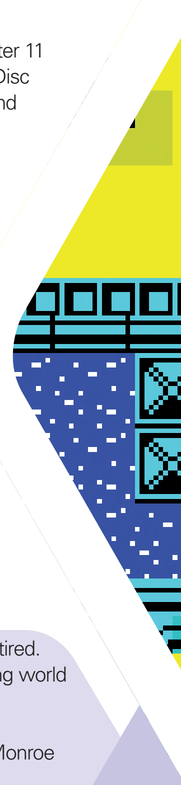
Activision decided to branch out in other fields of software in 1988, and so the decision was made to change the corporate name to Mediagenic. Activision was still used as the publishing name for videogames; hence the likely confusion at the time with reports stating Activision had been acquired by a company called Mediagenic. The Electric Dreams label though was phased out the following year.

By 1992 however, this branching out into other areas had left Mediagenic so financially stretched that it had to file for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. Following a reorganisation and merger with The Disc Company, Mediagenic changed its name back to Activision and concentrated solely on videogames from that point onwards. "Bruce Davis ran Imagic into the ground, and he ran Activision into the ground as well," states Crane. "Why they hired him following what happened at Imagic, I don't know."

Since then Activision has gone from strength to strength, publishing revised workings of Atari classics including *Battlezone*; acquiring the rights to publish the *Quake* series; and the seemingly continued success of Neversoft's *Tony Hawk* series amongst others. It has though, to all intents and purposes, become much like any other big publisher, with continued success via established series and not that many original titles. On the other hand, it has also published *Activision Anthology* for PS2 and GBA with as many 2600 games as possible crammed into it (and a few prototypes as well), and is probably the best retro anthology out there to date.

Today Crane and Gary Kitchen work together at Skyworks, founded by them ten years ago to produce Internet and interactive games; Miller joined them in 2001; Kaplan and Whitehead both now do volunteer and charity work having retired. The legacy they started and left for the rest of the videogaming world however is immeasurable.

With thanks to AtariAge (www.atariage.com) and Shane Monroe for photos and scans used within the article.





of game perhaps

SOFTOGRAPHY

1980

Dragster (Atari 2600)
Fishing Derby (Atari 2600)
Checkers (Atari 2600)
Boxing (Atari 2600)
Skiing (Atari 2600)
Bridge (Atari 2600)

1981

Ice Hockey (Atari 2600)
Stampede (Atari 2600, Intellivision)
Tennis (Atari 2600)
Laser Blast (Atari 2600)
Freeway (Atari 2600)
Kaboom! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)
Megamania (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)
Barnstorming (Atari 2600)

1982

Starmaster (Atari 2600)
Spider Fighter (Atari 2600)
Sky Jinks (Atari 2600)
Grand Prix (Atari 2600)
Chopper Command (Atari 2600)
Seaquest (Atari 2600)
River Raid (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64, Spectrum)
Pitfall! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64)

1983

Beamrider (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Intellivision, C64, Spectrum)
Space Shuttle (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Crackpots (Atari 2600)
Dolphin (Atari 2600)
Oink! (Atari 2600)
Pressure Cooker (Atari 2600)
Keystone Kapers (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision)
Activision Decathlon (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64)
Frostbite (Atari 2600)
Worm Whomper (Intellivision)
Happy Trails (Intellivision)

1984

Private Eye (Atari 2600)
Mindshadow (Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Toy Bizarre (C64, Spectrum)
Park Patrol (C64)
Ghostbusters (Atari 2600, Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, NES)
H.E.R.O. (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Pitfall 2 (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Apple II, C64, Spectrum)
Pastfinder (Atari 8-bit, C64)
Zone Ranger (Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, C64)
Designer's Pencil (Atari 8-bit, C64)

1985

Rock 'N Bolt (C64)
Xcel (Spectrum)
Hacker (Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Little Computer People (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Barry McGuigan's World Championship Boxing (C64, Amstrad)
Chopper (C64)
Gary Kitchen's Gamemaker (C64)
I of the Mask (Spectrum)
Riddler's Den (Spectrum)

1986

Aliens US (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Hacker 2 (Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Shanghai (C64, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Alter Ego (Apple II, C64, PC)
Murder on the Mississippi (C64)
Transformers (C64)
Dandy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Deus Ex Machina (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Mermaid Madness (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
RMS Titanic (C64)
Spindizzy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Xarq (Spectrum, Amstrad)

1987

Rampage (Atari 2600, Atari 7800, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC, Master System)
Kung Fu Master (Atari 2600)
Knightmare (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Wonderboy (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Super Pitfall (NES)
Enduro Racer (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Guadalcanal (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Top Fuel Eliminator (C64)
X-15 Alpha Mission (C64)
Aliens UK (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Big Trouble In Little China (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Explorer (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Firetrack (C64)
Super Hang-On (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Super Sprint (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Tempest (Spectrum, Amstrad)

1988

Commando (Atari 2600)
River Raid 2 (Atari 2600)
Ocean Ranger (C64, PC)
Bomber Raid (Master System)
Afterburner (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
F-14 Tomcat (C64)
R-Type (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Karnov (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
September (C64, Spectrum)
Cyborg Hunter (Master System)

1989

Altered Beast (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Die Hard (C64, PC, NES)
Mechwarrior (PC, SNES)
Dynamite Dux (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Power Drift (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC)
Shanghai 2 (PC, SNES, MegaDrive)
Deathtrack (PC)
Grave Yardage (C64, PC)
Prophecy (PC)
Ghostbusters 2 (Atari 2600, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC, NES, Gameboy)
Apache Strike (C64)
Beyond Dark Castle (C64, Amiga, Atari ST)
Galaxy Force (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, Master System)
Time Scanner (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
Citadel (C64)
Incredible Shrinking Sphere (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad)
Wicked (C64)
Stealth ATF (NES)
Dominator (Spectrum)

1990

Archon (NES)
Ninja Spirit (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST)
The Real Ghostbusters (C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, Gameboy)
Adventures of Rad Gravity (NES)
Atomic Robokid (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Hammerfist (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Time Machine (C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST)
Sword Master (NES)
Heavyweight Championship Boxing (Gameboy)

1991

R-Type 2 (Amiga, Atari ST)
Hunter (Amiga, Atari ST)
Bush Buck: Global Treasure Hunter (Amiga)
Deuteros: The Next Millennium (Amiga)

1992

Ultimate Air Combat (NES)
Beast Busters (Amiga, Atari ST)

1993

Alien vs Predator (SNES, Gameboy)
BioMetal (SNES)
Return To Zork (PC, PS1, 3D0)
Popeye 2 (Gameboy)

1994

Radical Rex (SNES, MegaDrive, Sega CD)
Pitfall: The Mayan Adventure (SNES, MegaDrive, Sega CD, Sega 32X)
X-Kalibur 2097 (SNES)

1995

Shanghai: Great Moments (PC)
Mechwarrior 2 (PC, PS1, Saturn)
Mechwarrior 3050 (SNES)

1996

Power Move Pro Wrestling (PS1)
Zork Nemesis (PC)
Time Commando (PC, PS1)
Blast Chamber (PC, PS1, Saturn)
Blood Omen: Legacy of Kain (PS1)

1997

Shanghai: Dynasty (PC)
Interstate '76 (PC)
Nightmare Creatures (PC, PS1, N64)
Zork: Grand Inquisitor (PC)
Judge Dredd (PS1)
Hexen 2 (PC)
Quake 2 (PC, PS1, N64)

1998

Pitfall 3D: Beyond the Jungle (PS1)
Asteroids (PC, PS1, GBC)
Guardian's Crusade (PS1)
Vigilante 8 (PS1, N64)
Heretic 2 (PC)
Apocalypse (PS1)
Tenchu: Stealth Assassins (PS1)
SiN (PC)
Battlezone (PC)
The Fifth Element (PS1)
Pool Hustler (PS1)

1999

Civilization 2 (PS1)
Quake 3: Arena (PC)
Vigilante 8: Second Offensive (PS1, N64, Dreamcast)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater (PS1, N64, GBC, N-Gage)
Battlezone 2: Combat Commander (PC)
Blue Stinger (Dreamcast)
Toy Story 2 (PS1, N64, Dreamcast)
Guardian's Crusade (PS1)
TOCA 2 (PS1)
Wu-Tang: Shaolin Style (PS1)

2000

X-Men: Mutant Wars (GBC)
102 Dalmatians (GBC)
Vampire: The Masquerade – Redemption (PC)
Virtual-On (Dreamcast)
Blade (PS1, GBC)
Tenchu 2: Birth of the Stealth Assassins (PS1)
Alundra 2 (PS1)
X-Men: Mutant Academy (PS1, GBC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 (PS1, N64, Dreamcast, GBC, GBA)
Solder of Fortune (PC)
Spiderman (PS1, N64, Dreamcast, GBC)
Sky Odyssey (PS2)

2001

Doom (GBA)
Bomberman Tournament (GBA)
The Simpsons Wrestling (PS1)
X-Men: Mutant Academy 2 (PS1)
Toy Story Racer (PS1, GBC)
Pinobee: Wings of Adventure (GBA)
Spiderman 2: Enter Electro (PS1)
Return to Castle Wolfenstein (PC, PS2, Xbox)
Spiderman: Mysterio's Menace (GBA)
Commander Keen (GBA)
Tomb Raider: Curse of the Sword (GBC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3 (PS1, PS2, N64, GameCube, Xbox, GBC, GBA)
Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX (PS1, Dreamcast, GBC, GBA)
The Weakest Link (PS1)
Bloody Roar 3 (PS2)

2002

Doom 2 (GBA)
Wreckless: The Yakuza Missions (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Medieval: Total War (PC)
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 (PS1, PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Spiderman: The Movie (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Lost Kingdoms (GameCube)
Kelly Slater's Pro Surfer (PS2, GBA)
Activision Anthology (PS2)

2003

Tenchu: Wrath of Heaven (PS2)
Secret Weapons over Normandy (PC, PS2)
Tony Hawk's Underground (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
True Crime: Streets of LA (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Indiana Jones and the Emperor's Tomb (PC, PS2, Xbox)
Lost Kingdoms 2 (GameCube)
Soldier of Fortune 2 (Xbox)

2004

Pitfall: The Lost Expedition (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA)
Tenchu: Return from Darkness (Xbox)
Spiderman 2: The Movie (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS, PSP, N-Gage)
Tony Hawk's Underground 2 (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS, PSP)
Vampire: The Masquerade – Bloodlines (PC)
Rome: Total War (PC)
X-Men Legends (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, N-Gage)
Call of Duty: Finest Hour (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, N-Gage)

2005

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox360, Nintendo DS)
Call of Duty 2: Big Red One (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Xbox360)
Shrek Superslam (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, GBA, Nintendo DS)
Doom 3 (Xbox)
True Crime: NYC (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
Madagascar (PS2, GameCube, Xbox, Nintendo DS)
Quake 4 (PC, Xbox 360)
X-Men Legends 2 (PS2, GameCube, Xbox)
The Movies (PC)
Mercenaries (PS2)

Timeline

Well where do you start with Activision? It's released games on just about every major Western system, and many of the Eastern ones too. Here are some of the most notable entries in the collection.

1980-92



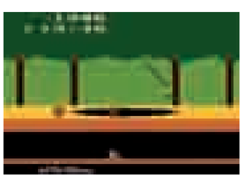
DRAGSTER (Atari 2600)

So Activision started with this game. It's also over rather quickly making it probably the shortest game in existence, with best times in the 5.6 second region. Deceptively simple like many other Activision titles, *Dragster* has a definite one-more-go feeling to try and edge fractions off your previous best.



KABOOM! (Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit)

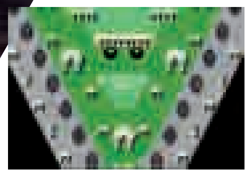
One of those games of its time, where the action remains the same but gets gradually harder and faster as the levels progress. With the precision of the paddle controller, it takes real skill to manoeuvre the water buckets to catch each bomb, inspiring that oft-quoted term 'the zone' to come into effect.



PITFALL! (Intellivision, C64)

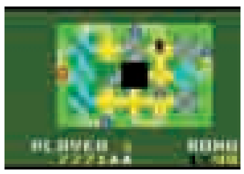
The big one. The game that made Activision and Dave Crane household names. Although partially overshadowed now by its sequel, *Pitfall* still retains the playability and charm it had, all done within 4k of ROM on the 2600. And to think the entire playing area layout is stored within one encrypted byte.

1983



THE DREADNAUGHT FACTOR Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Intellivision

Playing this makes you think it may have been the inspiration for *Uridium*. Whilst lacking in speed and silky scrolling, it has a highly strategic element instead. Whilst the aim is to destroy all the energy vents per ship, you only have a certain time to do it before each one reaches your planet. Destroying other parts first might slow it down. Inventive and entertaining at the same time.



HAPPY TRAILS Intellivision

Based on the arcade *Locomotion*, *Happy Trails* is Carol Shaw's 'other' Activision title, and improves on the concept by making the player collect stolen money bags from around the track on top of also keeping the moving object (in this case the sheriff) alive as long as possible whilst avoiding the bad guy. Paul Shirley copied the idea again in 1985 for the game *Confuzion*.



THE ACTIVISION DECATHLON Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64

The original and best joystick breaker, a year before Daley Thompson would be frustrating lots more players around the world. The 2600 version has an unusual bug in the pole-vaulting, which lets you gain almost unlimited height because Dave Crane forgot to tell the program to only accept one button press during the event!

1984

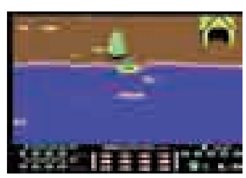


TOY BIZARRE

1984

C64, Spectrum

A clone that manages to out-*Mario Mario Bros* itself. Whilst appearing a little more forgiving initially, in that you have the chance to dispose of the various toys before they "hatch" and spread over the level, once out there the little troublemakers are difficult to remove and need strategy to outwit. And all the time Hefty Hilda is after you, making life ever more hectic.

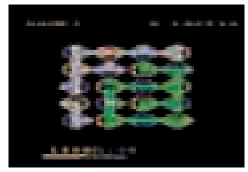


PARK PATROL

1984

C64

Ranger Smith only had Yogi Bear to worry about. Here you must confront vicious turtles, ants that nick your food, drowning swimmers and litter. Then there's the mysterious tree that grows slowly and seems to give off hallucinogenic fruit. Lots of fun to play, it also gets challenging rather quickly; however there is an editor to change the number of various features present per level.



ZENJI

1984

Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, C64, Spectrum

If the name conjures images of mysticism and a Zen-like state, then you'd be partly right. There's nothing mystic about the game, it's a brilliant execution of an inventive puzzle idea; make all the paths light up by connecting them to the middle "source". The Zen part comes from the fact that just "doing" and letting your instincts guide you works over actually trying to "think" about the solution.



PITFALL 2

1984

Atari 2600, Atari 5200, Atari 8-bit, Colecovision, Apple II, C64, Spectrum

Steve Cartwright actually came up with the idea of doing a sequel, but it was still Dave Crane's execution on the Atari 2600. For the 8-bit conversion, the programmer Mike Lorenzen had enough time to put in a whole second world whilst the others were finished, meaning you get twice as much goodness for your money. Possibly the biggest and best old school Activision game.

1985

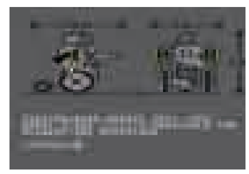


BARRY MCGUIGAN'S WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP BOXING

1985

C64, Amstrad

Probably the best "serious" and realistic boxing game available for a very long time, Activision's licence of the world-famous featherweight boxer added credence to its quality. In true *Rocky* style, take your nobody boxer, train him up and then challenge the best in the world in an attempt to claim the title. Clever, strategic and requiring thought, a definite winner.



HACKER

1985

Atari 8-bit, Apple II, C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST, PC

So you've found your way in. Now what? That was the question posed to countless people who took the plunge and dived into the unique world of *Hacker*. Deliberately left without instructions, it was up to you to figure out what was going on, who was doing what, and where you needed to go. Inventive and challenging, the game was a product of Cold War times and would be radically different if made today.



I OF THE MASK

1985

Spectrum

After the success of *3D Ant Attack*, Sandy White went on to produce this mini-gem of monochrome madness. The graphics move incredibly smoothly, even when going round corners, and the game presents a real challenge; having to map out the universes whilst searching for components of the robot in question, and then trying to subdue them by using the laser as they move all over the place in front of you.



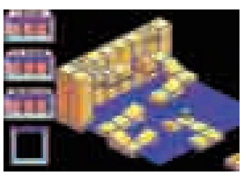
TRANSFORMERS
1986
C64
Not to be confused with the game released by Ocean, this shows that even Dave Crane couldn't always produce magic. Heavy on the disk access due to the large colourful graphics present, the game is a tedious mix of strategy planning and arcade shooting action, neither of which is much fun to play. The animated introduction is worth a look however.



ALTER EGO
1986
Apple II, C64, PC
Who do you want to be? Whoever you wanted to be with this compelling and unique piece of software. Designed in conjunction with psychologist Peter Favaro, *Alter Ego* encompasses seven stages of life, and may just reveal a bit about yourself in the process. The fact there are male and female versions means no one gets left out, or it can allow you to see 'from the other side'.



PORTAL
1986
Apple II, C64, Amiga, Atari ST, PC
Intended to be the first of a number of interactive novels, poor sales meant *Portal* was the only title to be released. With an intriguing sci-fi style plot and twists and turns aplenty, it's an engaging and interesting read, hampered by the slightly clunky interface. Worth checking out if you are into that sort of thing.



SPINDIZZY
1986
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Cartographer? Not the most exciting profession in the world now. But what if the world was unexplored and unknown? Paul Shirley's masterpiece in the vast expansive take on *Marble Madness* was a classic from the start. Big and challenging, this was one game that would take months to master and longer to finish properly. You best get mapping then.

1 9 8 6



GALACTIC GAMES
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Most likely an idea someone had to copy Epyx's successful Games series, but instead host it in space. So you get events such as the 100-metre slither, head throwing and psychic judo in place of the usual running, jumping and chucking. Daft, and a little bit fun in places, it ultimately was ignored in place of the 'real' thing.



ALIENS (UK)
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
Activision published two *Aliens* games, one under the normal label and this one under the Electric Dreams name. With the game taken from a pseudo first-person angle, it gives a much more in-your-face experience and tension when you see the aliens moving about.

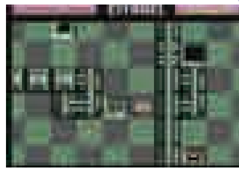


ENDURO RACER
1987
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad
A perfect example of how two different programming teams can produce wildly varying results. The Spectrum version was excellent, clean looking and playable despite the cheat bug. The C64 version on the other hand was a complete travesty of a game, with no redeeming features to mention; even the sound was arguably worse.



AFTERBURNER
1988
C64, Spectrum, Amstrad, Amiga, Atari ST
Like many of Sega's coin-ops including *Space Harrier* and *Galaxy Force*, you do wonder what the appeal of trying to convert such a game to home formats is when most of the thrill is lost from not being in the arcade cab. *Afterburner* was a mixed bag conversion.

1 9 8 7 - 8



CITADEL
1989
C64
The epitaph of Martin Walker's C64 career and a damn fine game in the process. Part strategy and part arcade game, *Citadel* was underappreciated at the time despite critical acclaim. Take your robot probe deep into unknown cities in an attempt to disable the security via force or coercion and hopefully find out what it is they are guarding. Truly a magical challenging gem.

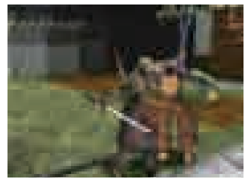


MECHWARRIOR
1989
PC, SNES
Text: Big stompy robots. With guns. How could you fail? As the only surviving son of the leader of Ander's Moon, it's your task to avenge your father's death and retrieve a chalice stolen when he was attacked. To do this requires money, skill, tactics and large metal objects of death. Entertaining and fun, the later games vastly improved on the world and ideas.



TIME MACHINE
1990
C64, Spectrum, Amiga, Atari ST
From the minds of Vivid Image came an intriguing time-travel game. Accidentally sent back in time following an explosion, you must make keep the future as it was and prevent the explosion from occurring. Clever, head-scratching (but still logical) puzzles abound, and solving each one makes you smile as you progress through each time zone back to the present.

1 9 8 9 - 9 0



TENCHU: STEALTH ASSASSINS
1998
PS1
Tenchu might have been released first, but *Metal Gear Solid* got all the plaudits for stealth action. Which is a shame because *Tenchu* does the whole stealth thing better, but at the expense of not looking so hot (indeed the graphics, even by standards then, were a bit blocky). If you ever wanted to be a ninja, killing people and then disappearing into the shadows, this is the game to get.

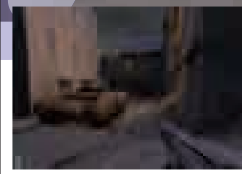


BATTLEZONE
1998
PC
A radical update of the classic Atari coin-op, but one that is very worthy of the name. No longer bound to the realms of arcade action, the new *Battlezone* has a heavy real-time strategy element as you micromanage resources and command other units to attack or retreat. If your own vehicle is almost dead, then you can even jump out and attempt to commandeer another one.

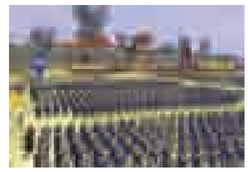


TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER
1999
PS1, N64, GBC, N-Gage
Although there had been successful skate games in the past such as *Skate Or Die* and *720*, Neversoft's licence with *Tony Hawk* proved a massive success and put skateboarding firmly into the homes of millions of people. It continues to be one of Activision's most popular series now into its seventh game with presumably more to come in the future.

1 9 9 8 - 9



RETURN TO CASTLE WOLFENSTEIN
2001
PC, PS2, Xbox
The original *Castle Wolfenstein 3D* was the blueprint for the modern first-person shooter. Now it was time to update the franchise and give it the backing of some modern PC grunt. Helped out by original creators id Software, it's an action-packed shooting fest of a game, allied with a balanced, addictive multi-player component. It doesn't do anything new this time, but it does it well.



ROME: TOTAL WAR
2004
PC
War… what is it good for? Making computer simulations, that's what. After the success of *Medieval: Total War*, Creative Assembly switched the time period for its next game to ancient Rome. As a mix of turn-based and real-time action it works very well, with management of the armies handled on a rote basis, but all the gory battling happens as it is before your eyes.

2 0 0 1 +



HUANG DI

ASIAN FANTASY ACTION AT ITS BEST



- » **PUBLISHER:** ASDER
- » **RELEASED:** 1990
- » **GENRE:** PLATFORMER
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** FAMICOM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5 (BOOTLEG)



HISTORY

Throughout its life the Famicom remained buoyant on an ocean of mostly identikit platformers, the generic nature of many being painfully apparent today. Cutting through these, like shiny glass through a slimy eyeball, is *Huang Di*. The fact that it's an unlicensed game from Taiwan based company Asder makes it even more special; most unlicensed games are dreadful.

As fresh to play now as it was years ago, *Huang Di* stays relevant thanks to several clever ideas. Firstly, you can fly anywhere, anytime, indefinitely! Not that this makes the game easy, since each level has clever enemy and platform positioning. And what levels they are, with their vibrantly detailed and animated backgrounds! One moment you're battling along a river, before flying above a burning village where headless undead warriors throw severed limbs at you. After a quick jaunt underground you're soon navigating a bamboo forest through the air, before fighting a wildcat under cover of moonlight, and then traversing a pulsating jungle of fungi.

The enemies are all based on recognisable Asian myths and legends, and defeating the demonic bosses rewards you with some particularly gory cutscenes. To dispatch them you have both a projectile-firing katana and several sorcerers' spells, all of which activate by holding aloft said sword and summoning down lightning. There is tremendous satisfaction to be had from correctly navigating a maze, reaching a devil spider's web-covered lair, and then slaying the unholy beast with your blade. The distinct oriental settings, themes, enemies and exceptionally catchy music, all make *Huang Di* reminiscent of such films as *A Chinese Ghost Story*, and other Asian fighting fantasy epics.

It may be rough around the edges (collision detection isn't perfect and it's damned tough), but even today *Huang Di* still has great zest. It's a pity then that due to being unlicensed, finding a copy in the wild will be very difficult. Even if you can't visit Beijing for the afternoon, we're sure you'll find other ways to play it!

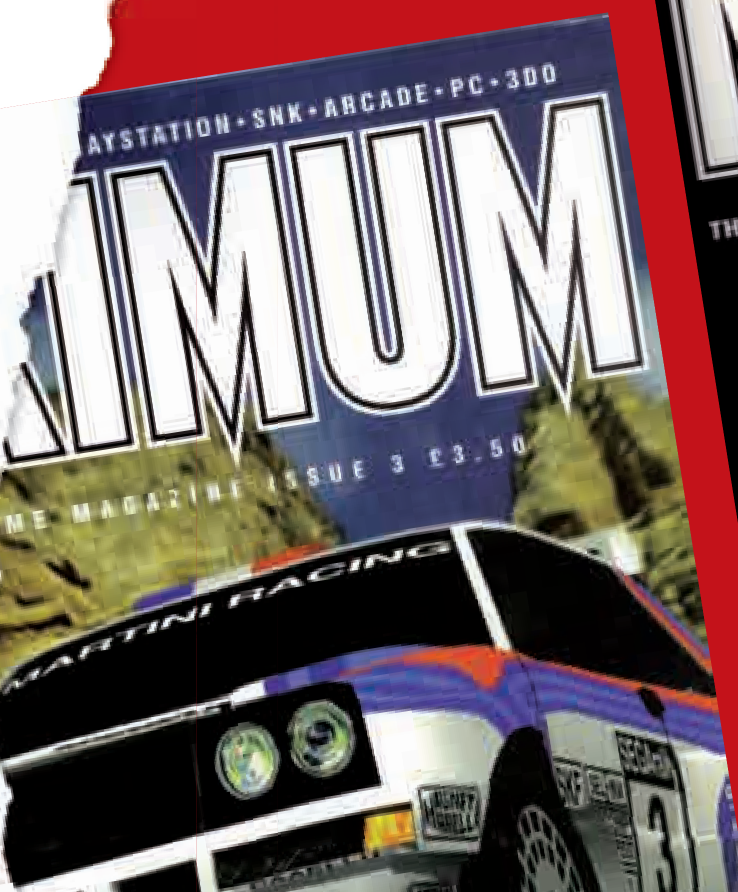


MAXIMUM CARNAGE

RETRO GAMER HAS PAID TRIBUTE TO A NUMBER OF CLASSIC VIDEOGAME MAGAZINES OVER THE YEARS, EACH ONE AS CHERISHED BY ITS FANS AS THE LAST. MAXIMUM IS NO EXCEPTION SO WHY DID IT ONLY LAST SEVEN ISSUES? ASHLEY DAY ASKS CREATORS RICH LEADBETTER AND GARY HARROD THE VERY SAME QUESTION.

DATA BOX

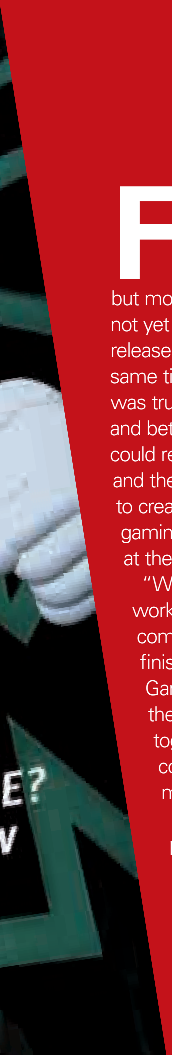
» **NAME:** MAXIMUM
» **ISSUES:** SEVEN
» **ERA:** 1995-1996
» **PAGES:** 132-164
» **STAFF:** RICH LEADBETTER, GARY HARROD, DAVID HODJSON, DANIEL JEVONS, YASUHIRO HUNTER, WARREN HARROD











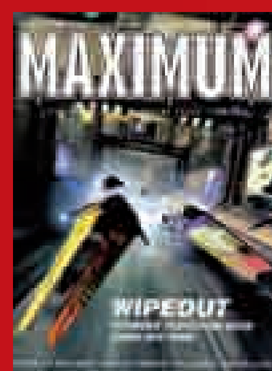
"THEY WERE EAGER TO GIVE THE GAMES THE DETAILED COVERAGE THEY DESERVED AND SET ABOUT DESIGNING THE PERFECT MULTIFORMAT MAG"

For Richard Leadbetter (Editor) 1995 was a good year to be into games: "We were there for the games industry's real transition into 3D and it was a great era. There was lots of gaming experimentation, but more than that, the descent into mainstream marketing had not yet truly begun. So the likes of Nintendo and Sega could release creative-driven games that seemed truly epic, and at the same time we were still in a beautiful time when arcade gaming was truly coming into its own." Videogames were growing bigger and better and the British public needed a games magazine that could reflect that. So when EMAP Images (then publisher of CVG and the Official Nintendo Magazine) set an internal competition to create a new mag that could represent the new generation of gaming, Richard and colleague Gary Harrod (Art Editor) jumped at the chance.

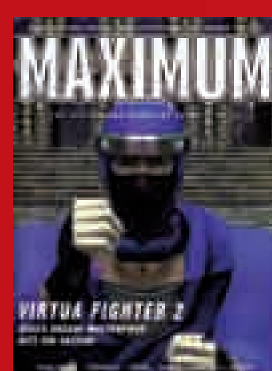
"We put together Maximum after spending a long while working on format-specific titles" recalls Richard. "I had just come off the official Sega magazine, and Gary Harrod was finishing off his tour of duty on the official Nintendo magazine. Gary and I were really annoyed at just how shockingly awful the multiformat magazines were." The pair was eager to put together a magazine that gave the new games the detailed coverage they deserved and set about designing the perfect multiformat magazine.

"The idea was that gamers only bought 2-3 games per month, and those games were pretty expensive at £40+. That's not just an investment of money; it's an investment of time and effort worthy of recognition. So our coverage was meant to be an info-fuelled explosion of coverage not just to tell you if the game was worth buying but to work as a companion piece once you had actually bought it. We also saw that gamers were turning into collectors and we wanted to produce collectible coverage to the games of the time." "It was influenced by the Japanese strategy guides," confirms Gary. "We wanted to create a semi-official look for the pages themed around the games themselves."

Issue 1 touched down in newsagents across the country in October 1995 and immediately stood out from the crowd. The cover featured a striking CG render, from the PlayStation game WipEout, that was relatively uncluttered by text. There was no free gift and no advert on the back page. It looked like a serious magazine for adult gamers and, as Rich and Gary had intended, it looked like something you would want to keep forever. Rich's editorial introduced Maximum as "a new type of videogames magazine designed to meet the next generation of gaming" and extolled the virtues of gameplay over graphics, explaining that only the best games of the month would benefit from the 6-14 pages of coverage reserved for each "Extended Play". The games featured in this debut issue showcased some of the finest releases of 1995. *Tekken 2*, *King Of Fighters 95*, *Fade To Black* and *Street Fighter Alpha* took up an incredible 33 pages of the 164-page magazine. It was a brave move to give so much space to so few games but the decision proved to be a wise one. Each game has since gone on to be considered a modern classic, making the first issue of Maximum a true collectible for anyone who was/is fanatical about the featured games.



» Issue 1 set the tone for the following six. A love of both excellent gameplay and groundbreaking graphics were clear



» Issue 2's coverage of *VF2* and *Tekken 2* spawned a feud between Namco and Sega fans that lasted until Issue 7

MAXIMUM CARNAGE

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

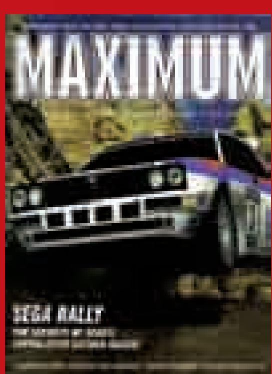
Choosing a name for Maximum was, as Rich reveals, just as troublesome as the rest of the magazine's production "We put down on paper the core attributes of the magazine and decided that the key aspect for us was the colossal amount of detail and information packed into the issue. We went through a massive amount of names, but eventually settled on 'Overload'. Alas, we had a tip-off from a certain PR in the industry that the name had already been taken by a hardcore gay porn mag! So that was the end of that. The mag's original name was 'Xtreme' but Lord EMAP decided to rip-off our name for an extreme sports magazine that never happened. In the end we settled on 'Maximum' for want of a name, any name, and the logo treatment looked cool so we stuck with it."

"MISSED DEADLINES MEANT BIG LOSSES AND EMAP BUSINESS-HEADS GOT CONCERNED. NONE OF US EDITORIALLY CARED FOR THE BUSINESS SIDE OF THINGS"

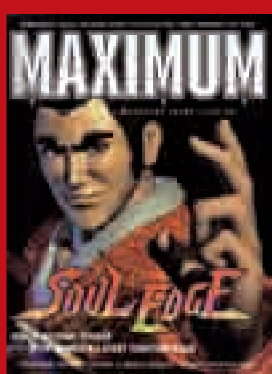
In contrast to Mean Machines (Gary and Rich's previous multiformat mag) Maximum focused less on the writers and more on the actual subject matter. The first two issues didn't even feature any credits so, from a readers perspective, Maximum was all about the games. Gary explains: "Mean Machines' focus was on opinion and personality and that was its strength. It was important then to feature mugshots and artwork of the staff to build the relationship with the readers. Maximum took a more factual and informative approach. We did not feel that grinning staff members cracking gags and such fit the style of the magazine."

With this approach to informative content the screenshots needed to resemble the actual game as closely as possible and both Gary and Rich took great pride in ensuring this was achieved, much to the detriment of EMAP's deadlines. "Anyone involved in publishing should constantly push for the best possible materials to use," asserts Gary. "Our screens were a combination of getting the best possible shot using the best bespoke grabbing technology. It took more time and effort and most readers probably never noticed but I could not work any other way."

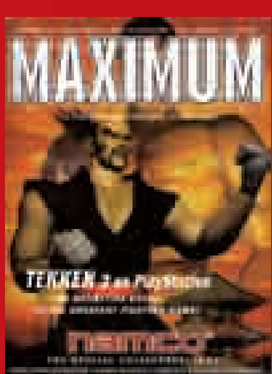
The effort that went into Issue 1 seemed to have paid off, as initial sales were very healthy. Both Gary and Richard suggest different sales figures of 20,000 and 25,000 respectively but either number would have been considered a success for a multiformat magazine "at that high cover price" as Rich puts it. With a price of £3.50 (£2 more than C&VG) and encouraging sales of the first issue, Maximum looked set to rake in the cash but the situation soon got a lot less rosy as sales of the next three issues plummeted and the magazine staff became disenchanted with EMAP's attitude toward the publication. "The magazine was too much work for the team to put together," claims Rich. "To put this into perspective, it wasn't until issue #4 that we actually had a full team. The first three issues (which some might argue are easily the best) were put together with just a handful of people and we kept missing deadlines because of this. Missed deadlines meant big financial losses and quite rightly EMAP business-heads got concerned. At the time, none of us editorially cared about the business side of things, we wanted to get the mag out, but only if the quality was there. This led to a whole series of enormous rows with management and it was an argument that we'd never have won. The magazine's major nemesis turned out to be sales figures, choosing to do Saturn games on the covers of issues 2 and 3 wiped out sales big time. The lowest selling issue was *Soul Edge* on Issue 4 (we were a bit ahead of our time there as it had not yet come to PlayStation), but even the big *Tekken 2* issue that followed it barely got us back into the 20,000s. From that



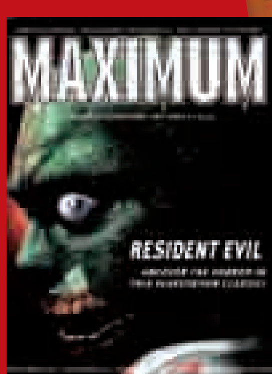
» Issue 3 was the very definition of hardcore games journalism as it splashed over 30 pages on the latest 2D beat-'em-ups



» Issue 4 was the lowest selling issue of Maximum despie its 164 pages of classic gaming



» Issue 5 was a Namco special with 40 pages of *Tekken 2* plus features on *Namco Collection* and *Ridge Racer*



» *Super Mario 64*, *NiGHTS* and *Virtua Fighter 3* are all shown for the first time in Issue 6. This was a must-have issue







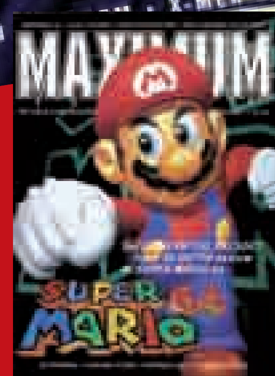


moment on, we knew that the magazine was essentially dead, so even though the *Resident Evil* cover (Issue 6) did well, we'd all pretty much had enough. We'd had enough of the 100 hour weeks, enough of the rows with management and most of the team had lost all faith in EMAP and were being actively courted by Die Hard Game Fan in the States who actually appreciated the work we were doing."

Although Rich is quick to point out the low sales of Maximum's early issues, those sales are overshadowed by the real value of the magazines. Adorning the covers with images from *Virtua Fighter 2* and *Sega Rally* did little to endear Maximum to the mainstream but those who were into their Sega games found a lot to love. Issue 2 had no editorial column at all – there was simply no room for it as the mag opened with a quick contents page then jumped straight into a goliath 14-page feature on *Virtua Fighter 2*. The text did its job of generating excitement for the excellent arcade conversion but it was the screenshots that were the real stars of the feature. Up to eight individual screens were used to showcase many of the game's moves in loving detail: each one accompanied by a text box that explained how to pull off the move properly. Rich and Gary's dream, of a magazine that would be a companion piece to the reader's games, had truly come alive with this feature and the rest of the issue was no exception. Each subsequent issue built on this high benchmark of quality coverage but, with professional relations being strained to breaking point behind the scenes, the magazine couldn't possibly go on much longer.

Although the first six issues (equal parts informative and celebratory as they were) were invaluable resources to the readers, it had become clear to the editorial team that reader interest simply wasn't enough. "Our budget was always zero." complains Gary, " Zero ads, zero promotion, zero interest. Need I say more? Maximum hit at a time when EMAP was losing interest in the games sector. Losing the PlayStation licence to Future was the start of the end. EMAP signalled to us that they did not value or respect the gaming magazine market and it all started to crumble." Although both the Maximum team and EMAP had lost interest in the magazine, the publication continued for one last issue – and what an issue it was. The cover featured *Super Mario 64*, hailed it the "game of the decade" and gave up a staggering 21 pages of the magazine to the cutting-edge Nintendo 64. The remaining 122 pages were filled with classic after classic, from *Metal Slug* to *NiGHTS*; Issue 7 was one of the most exciting games magazines of the year. But, as the final page revealed, it was to be the end of Maximum. Though the epilogue promised that a new and improved version of the magazine would return by Christmas, it never happened. "The relaunch was mostly corporate wind and piss," reveals Rich, "there was never any real belief in the magazine after the running battle the previous six months had been. Plus one of the major reasons why we'd done it all in the first place, because all the other multiformat mags were dire, had been addressed somewhat by the outstanding relaunch of Computer and Video Games under the auspices of Paul Davies, Tom Guise and Ed Lomas. Why take a risk relaunching Maximum when C&VG's sales were increasing so dramatically? I think by the end of the Maximum era they were outselling us four to one."

Maximum disappeared from the news stands never to return, and although Rich concedes that the rise of C&VG made the magazine redundant, it was greatly missed by its fans and, over the next ten years, it built up a strong cult following. Maximum's readers now scour eBay for issues to complete their collection and lament the early demise of one of the few magazines that took games as seriously as themselves. For Rich, their love of the magazine is a silver lining on a cloud we suspect he would rather forget. "Most of my tenure at EMAP was lots of fun, but Maximum was pretty hellish to be honest, so the odd kind word about our work there does perhaps make us feel better in light of what was the only commercial failure we ever worked on!"



» The final issue went out with a bang thanks to in-depth N64 coverage and a 6/5 review for *Mario 64*

TSK. MAGAZINES THESE DAYS!

"There is zero commitment to outstanding editorial quality within the magazine market now, and every title in their respective fields is virtually interchangeable." comments Rich on modern games mags. "Nobody knows the value of a good screenshot, nobody truly respects the artwork generated for each game, and the actual commitment to integrity has long since disappeared around the U-bend in favour of tying up promotions of one sort or another. Now, I'm not sure whether Maximum was a move in the right direction editorially but we knew how to enthuse and excite people about games;we knew how to immerse you in games culture, and we'd spend days, even weeks, getting that coverage right. These days, it's all about tips books and playable demos to the point where the magazine itself is pretty much irrelevant." Is he right? Well, we can only assume that he's never read Retro Gamer.


AMSTRAD
GT 65 Monitor
AMSTRAD

Year Released: 1984

Original Price: £199 with green screen monitor, £299 with colour

Buy it now for: £10 to £25

Associated Magazines: Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad (later known as CPC Computing), Amstrad Computer User (official publication – began life as CPC 464 User, then Amstrad CPC 464 User before changing name when 664 was introduced in 1985), Amstrad Action, CPC Attack – and a host of top fanzines, including Artificial Intelligence, Better Than Life and the biggest of them all, the serious mag WACCI

Why the Amstrad CPC 464 was great… You didn't just own an Amstrad CPC464 – it became an integral part of your life. It was the ace up your sleeve, to be used when someone said: "What's best: the Spectrum or C64?" You could smilingly answer: "Neither! The CPC beats them both" And it did. This underdog of a computer had a few tricks – great graphics, decent sound and so many enthusiastic users who refused to let go when the machine died. CPC owners were proud of their choice and rightly so.



AMSTRAD CPC 464



IN THE EIGHTIES, GAMES WERE PRODUCED FOR THE SPECTRUM AND COMMODORE. AND, OF COURSE, THE AMSTRAD. BUT MANY PEOPLE PAID LITTLE NOTICE TO THE UNDERRATED UNDERDOG THAT WAS THE CPC 464. YET SIR ALAN SUGAR'S 8-BIT ENTRY INTO THE WORLD OF HOME MICROS NEVERTHELESS PROVED TO BE A HIT, AS DAVID CROOKES EXPLAINS.

The best things come to those who wait – and with the Amstrad CPC 464, that was certainly the case. When this marvellous machine was launched on April 11, 1984, to more than 400 journalists packed into the Great Hall of London's historic Westminster School, it was commonly agreed it had its work cut out.

It was competing against the Spectrum and Commodore 64, but Alan Sugar was confident his technically superior CPC – affectionately codenamed Arnold – would win.

It certainly struck a chord with the press: The Guardian called it Amstradivarius, Personal Computer World boldly said it was the Sinclair Beater and Computer News referred to it as Arthur.

The Grimsby Evening Telegraph called it the Mean Machine, but the London Evening Standard went one better. "After the People's Car [the VW Beetle] the People's Computer," it gushed.

Mr Sugar was planning worldwide sales of more than 20 million computers and was keen to shift an initial 100,000 that had been created prior to launch.

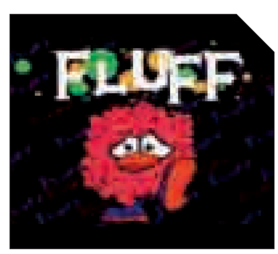
The launch had tried to capture the imagination of journalists by using historical figures ranging from Einstein, Ravel and Archimedes to Monet and Shakespeare to highlight the various attributes of the CPC (Shakespeare, for instance, showed how easy writing *Hamlet* would have been with a word processing package).

Amstrad was keen to portray the CPC – the Colour Personal Computer – as a 'jack of all trades'. Whereas the Spectrum and C64 were becoming firmly established as decent games machines, the CPC was being marketed as equally good for business.

And Amstrad wanted to get the machines out in the shops by the end of June, with Bill Poel, the general manager of Amsoft, telling Your Computer: "I will be prepared to eat one in Trafalgar Square if it's late." He didn't have to. On June 21, the machine was made available to buy

Post-production

When the 464 Plus was scrapped, it heralded the end of this great machine. For a while, commercial companies continued to support the computer, knocking out a host of budget and full-priced titles, including the brilliant *Super Cauldron* and *Prehistorik* in 1993. But as time went on, the market was placed in the hands of hard-core users who set up their own software companies. Among the best was Radical Software, makers of *Fluff* and *Ball Bearing.* The majority of these games were available on tape (the brilliant *Zap T Balls* was not, being disc only and 128K). But as more and more games began to be released into the public domain for free, it became difficult for 464 users to find people willing to copy the latest homebrew titles onto cassettes). Unless they bought a disc drive, 464 owners found themselves shut off from many of the new wave of games, among the best being *Croco Magneto* and *Les Mings* (typically available by sending a disc, an SAE and 50p).



AMSTRAD CPC 464



» Sir Alan Sugar, now star of BBC2's *The Apprentice*, with more hair at the launch of the CPC 464



» Roland Perry – Amstrad's group technical manager at the time of the CPC 464's launch

at Rumbelows in Edgware Road, London. Around 60 people queued for nearly an hour to get their hands on it, rushing forward when the doors finally opened at 9.30am. By 10.30am, 100 computers had been sold and software was being snapped from the shelves. It was reported that one man had even flown in from Bahrain!

Roland Perry, then Amstrad group technical manager, says: "We were pleased with this initial success. Sir Alan had wanted to create the CPC 464 because he wanted to get into the home computer market. It was the 'latest thing' that was clearly catching on as a mainstream item in the shops and we wanted to be a part of it. To see it sell was very pleasing."

Prior to the launch, Amstrad had been desperate for software, particularly games. The solution was to launch Amsoft at the beginning of 1984, tasked with approaching third-party companies to create 50 CPC games. Some of the games were given away with the CPC 464 for free and these included *Harrier Attack*, *The Galactic Plague*, *Roland On The Ropes*, *Fruit Machine*, *Bridge-It* and *Xanagrams*.

"Games were very important for the 464," continues Perry. "The subsequent CPC 664 and then 6128 with their disc drives started a trend towards small business use with CP/M and word processing and accounting packages, but for me the CPC 464 was 100 percent a games machine."

The 8-bit CPC was impressive. Amstrad decided to use tapes as the storage medium because they were cheap. It was a good decision – it placed the CPC within the affordable reach of children and so the machine slowly became a strong games contender.

Although programmers wished it had hardware sprites, at the CPC's heart was a Z80 processor running at 4MHz. It had 64K of memory, a built-in tape drive (an external 3-inch disc drive was available to buy later), and the choice of colour or green screen monitor.

The computer had three display modes. Mode 0 allowed 16 colours from the 27-strong palette to be shown in low resolution. Mode 1 used up to four colours from 27 in medium resolution. And mode 2 – which had the highest resolution – was able to show two colours from 27.

The 464 used the General Instruments AY-3-8912 sound chip that outputted in mono via a tiny, four centimetre, built-in loudspeaker with volume control. It provided 3-voice, 8-octave sound capacity. In later 464 models, stereo output was made available through a 3.5mm headphones jack which could also be linked to external speakers.

While it didn't hit the heights of the C64, the sound capabilities were good enough to allow digital sound samples in games such as *Robin Hood* and *Robocop*. But for the less technically savvy, the machine was striking for other reasons. Aside from the all-important joystick port, the keyboard, computer and tape deck were combined in one unit connected with just two wires to a monitor, which contained the power supply unit. The whole thing was powered by one plug in what proved to be a tidy, simple system, attractive to the public. It also kept manufacturing costs down. But the keyboard itself was



» The CPC was marketed as the all-in-one solution, playing into the hands of the technophobes

more striking. Long and thin, and with the tape deck to the right of the keyboard, it had garish red, green and blue keys.

Perry says: "We wanted the keyboard to look like a 'real computer' – the sort of thing people saw at the airline check-in desk when they went on holiday. The integrated tape deck was created because Amstrad's success had been making integrated consumer electronics like the Hi-Fi that had nothing extra to buy and no complicated wiring. For this reason we bundled the CPC with a monitor."

Although the Z80 chip powered the CPC, Amstrad initially pondered using a 6502 processor, the same one used in Commodore's Vic-20 and in the Apple II. It was to have 32k of RAM and Microsoft's BASIC. In the end, Locomotive Software, which produced the CPC's BASIC, persuaded Amstrad to try the faster Z80 instead.

"We started the development of the Amstrad by having a basic idea and coming up with an outline spec, then filling in more details as we went along," continues Perry. "Sir Alan was pleased with the end result. Anything he didn't like we changed. I remember him wanting the cursor keys to 'work' at all times, which wasn't how people typically made BASIC interpreter interfaces at the time."

The CPC continued to pick up sales and was even making an impact in the classroom – in November 1984, Sir Keith Joseph, the minister of state for education and science, toured Thorpe Bay High School in Southend which was the first to have 464s.

But although the 464 sold well in Britain, it became a phenomenon in Europe, particularly in France where it was the best-selling home micro. In Spain it was distributed by Indescorp as the CPC472 (it had an extra 8K of – unusable – RAM to get around a Spanish ruling that computers with 64K or less had to contain a tilde (~) on the keyboard). In Germany, it was sold under Schneider's name but without the coloured keys.

"We would have been happy to sell 100,000 CPCs and get into the top ten sellers," continues Perry. "But we surpassed our expectations, got to the top of the charts and sold a couple of million. Much of that was because we insisted on distributing the machine in well-known High Street stores rather than solely mail order or in specialist computer stores. It was a complete system, not just a console."

Buoyant sales of the machine meant the vast majority of the major third-party software houses soon supported it. Games produced for the Spectrum and Commodore were created for the CPC, although, because the Spectrum shared the Z80 processor, many initial Amstrad games were lazy Speccy ports. Some of these games were sluggish and jerky and did not take advantage of the four and 16 colour modes nor the hardware scrolling. But when done well, the









CPC more than held its own with colourful graphics, great sound and smooth scrolling.

In 1985, the CPC had its first show, which took place in the Autumn at London's Novotel. Not many games software houses turned up – neither, come to that, did Amstrad itself.

But some great games were being released – David Braben's *Elite* made an appearance that Christmas. By this point, Sugar was claiming a 25 per cent market share and he boasted that the 464 was "the machine that everyone knows and loves... reputedly used by a well known vacuum manufacturer to stock control his cars!"

Leading software houses were also beginning to love the CPC. Nick Alexander, of Virgin Software, which had produced *Sorcery*, said the Amstrad version was the biggest seller of the three platforms it had made the game for. "If you compare the Amstrad with the Spectrum and C64," he said, "I think our programmers' attitude toward it is that it's superior – the leader of the pack."

The following year, Infocom announced its acclaimed adventures, including *Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy* and *Zork I*, *II* and *III*, were at last being released on the CPC.

But in the same year, Amstrad bought its rival, Sinclair, and began to produce the Spectrum, prompting speculation that the CPC 464 would be discontinued. Amstrad denied it would get rid of "a machine that is making us money", though industry observers said the disc-based CPC 6128 was making more cash. But Sugar did say the Sinclair purchase would mean the Spectrum being marketed as a games machine and the Amstrad for more serious stuff.

Such backing of the 464 by Sugar didn't quell speculation about the 464's future – by October, many software houses complained that software sales had slumped and blamed Amstrad, saying it had not produced enough 464s. Some claimed it had stopped production.

It was not the case and as the sales began to pick up again, the 464's golden era came as games were produced by the bucket load and a whole host of peripherals were created, one of the best being the Multiface 2 which allowed gamers to hack into games and input cheat codes that were printed in the mags (the Multiface could also



» Games are the order of the day for the 464 – if you choose the green screen, Amstrad says, "but still want to play your arcade games in colour – don't worry! There's a power supply and modulator for linking to your colour TV"

make copies of games!).

Despite rumours abounding that Amstrad would manufacture a 16-bit machine, the 464 continued (Amstrad did indeed produce a new machine in 1989, however – the flop games-based PC, the Sinclair P200). The 464 came under threat again in August 1987, when the disc-based Spectrum Plus 3 was launched – meaning that Amstrad had three machines coming in under £300 (Plus 2, Plus 3 and 464) on sale. And in 1988, Amstrad's club for CPC owners was sold off, prompting further speculation.

Instead, the 464 was dusted off and placed into a fresh bundle, adding a TV tuner allowing users to watch television on their monitors, 17 games including *Trivial Pursuit*, *Roland In Time* and *Scalextrix* (the only fun part of which was designing new tracks), a desk, a clock radio and a terrible joystick. It was the all-in-one solution.

At the same time, Amstrad posted profits of more than £90 million.In 1990, the 464 ceased production – only to be replaced with the revamped 464 Plus. It was white, with greater width, similar to an Amiga or Atari ST in style, and came with a cartridge port for games that took advantage of a palette of up to 4,026 colours. The coloured keys were banished and the old cardboard edge connectors were replaced with more robust expansion ports.

The Z80A processor running at 4MHz remained, as did the 64k. But it benefited from four-channel 16 sound stereo with the addition of Direct Memory Access that allowed music to play without burdening the processor.

The old 464 refused to die, however. Ground-breaking games continued to be released – *Prince Of Persia* in the Summer of 1991 looked so lush, it appeared almost identical to the Atari ST version. With fluid animation and smooth and detailed backgrounds it was one of the best games ever released for the system.

But with the 16-bit Amiga and Atari ST becoming increasingly popular, the 8-bit technology of the CPC, no matter how spruced up with the cartridge slot, failed to attract enough punters and although sales did rise, it was not enough to save the machine and it was finally, and sadly, discontinued.





» **Above left:** Amstrad Action was the biggest selling CPC magazine – at its height it sold 37,000 copies, easily beating the official ACU, Amtix, Computing With The Amstrad and the short-lived, six-issue CPC Attack **Right:** Amstrad begins to change strategy – promoting the disc-based 6128, leaving the 464 in the background



Behind the curtain

The East Germans created a CPC 464 clone called the KC Compact. It was around 95 per cent compatible with the Amstrad-made CPCs and could be connected to either a tape machine or external 5.25-inch disc drive (the CPC 664 and 6128 used 3-inch discs). Although ruining the Amstrad concept of everything in one box – the KC had an external power supply, a standalone computer/keyboard and used a standard television rather than a dedicated monitor – it still ran BASIC 1.1 and had 64K of RAM, although it used a U880 processor rather than Z80. An extra 64K was added when using the tape or disc drive adapter. The machine was scrapped shortly after the Berlin wall was pulled down. Over in West Germany at the time, the 464 was being produced by Schneider, which replaced the Amstrad badge on the computer's casing and had Schneider on the boot screen (as well as proper non-cardboard expansion edge connectors).



» A new case and the addition of a cartridge slot – for expensive £30 games – transformed the 464 into the 464 Plus



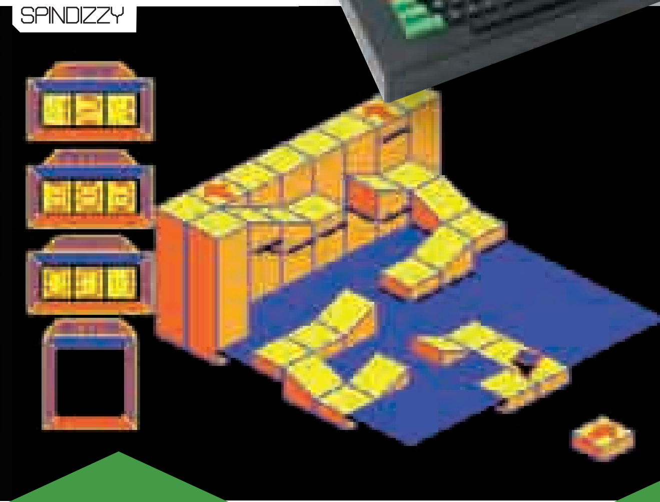
» This French-coded games became one of the CPC's best public domain titles

PERFECT TEN GAMES





NORTH & SOUTH



SPINDIZZY



TOTAL ECLIPSE

NORTH & SOUTH

» **RELEASED:** 1991
» **PUBLISHED BY:** INFOGRAMES
» **CREATED BY:** NEW FRONTIER
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** HOSTAGES

***North & South* is a great example of what the CPC could do when it wasn't being overloaded with Spectrum ports.** Whilst Infogrames' classic strategy title obviously can't hope to match the visuals of the impressive 16-bit versions, it's amazing how well it captures the spirit of the original French comic Les Tuniques Bleues on which the game is based.

Fortunately the gameplay proves to be just as immersive as the striking visuals and you'll soon find yourself frantically trying to regain as much of your opponent's land as possible while you fight it out with infantry, huge cannons and even mobile forces. Excellent stuff.

THE GUILD OF THIEVES

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** RAINBIRD
» **CREATED BY:** MAGNETIC SCROLLS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** FISH

There's a selection of great text adventures for the CPC, but it's the wonderful *Guild Of Thieves* we constantly return to. It's a meticulously crafted story, features some beautifully drawn locations and has some extremely devious puzzles to solve. Basically everything you'd expect from creators Magnetic Scrolls.

Like *The Pawn* before it, *The Guild Of Thieves* featured a lavish boxset that was filled with plenty of goodies that ranged from a Bank of Kerovnia credit card, to 'What Burglar' magazine and was once again set in Kerovnia. It's definitely a lot tougher, but is a far superior product that will have you scratching your head until the cows come home.

SPINDIZZY

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** ELECTRIC DREAMS
» **CREATED BY:** PAUL SHIRLEY
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** CONFUZION

The simplest ideas are often the best and they don't get much more straightforward than the wonderful *Spindizzy*. All you have to do is guide your spinning top around 386 isometric screens in search of jewels. Sounds simple right? Well no, not really, but that's why it's so great. While many of the jewels are easily placed, they soon start to appear in all sorts of hard-to-reach locations, many of which require real ingenuity to obtain. Later jewels can only be reached by flicking switches, using lifts and even jumping chasms, and that's before you even consider the terrain that becomes increasingly tricky to negotiate the further you progress. Oh, and did we mention you have to collect all these jewels within a strict time limit…

GRYZOR

» **RELEASED:** 1987
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** JOHN BRANDWOOD
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** RENEGADE

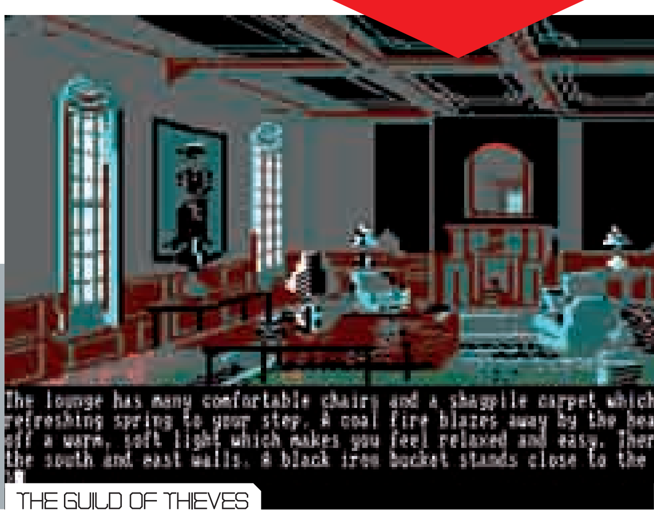
It's a sad matter of fact, but most Amstrad conversions were a poor third to the often-superior Spectrum and Commodore 64 ports. Every now and then though a game came along that totally blew its 8-bit peers away – *Gryzor* is one such game.

Not only does it look absolutely stunning (it features similar graphics to Mark Jones' other Ocean hit *Renegade*) it plays like a dream as well. Controls are extremely tight and responsive; the difficulty is just right and there's an array of superb weapons. Indeed, barring a few minor differences (and a big decrease in aesthetics) this is as close to the original game as you could expect an 8-bit to get. Simply amazing.

TOTAL ECLIPSE

» **RELEASED:** 1988
» **PUBLISHED BY:** INCENTIVE SOFTWARE
» **CREATED BY:** MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** DRILLER

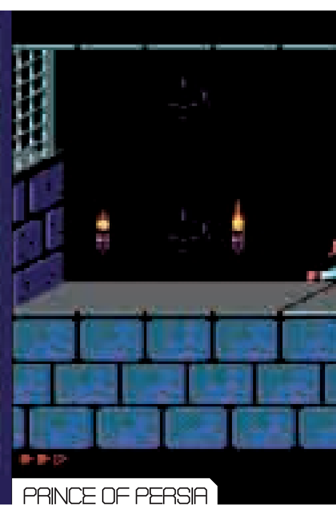
By the time *Total Eclipse* appeared in 1988, developers Incentive already had two Freescape titles under its belt. While there was nothing wrong with the sci-fi settings of *Driller* or *Darkside*, the familiar setting of Thirties Egypt makes *Total Eclipse* far easier to relate to. It also helps that it's more technically proficient, has superior puzzles and a creepy tone that makes exploring the pyramid extremely atmospheric. A number of play mechanics were introduced and there was a tight two-hour timeframe to complete the game in, which would have been fine if the pyramid itself wasn't so confusing to navigate.



THE GUILD OF THIEVES



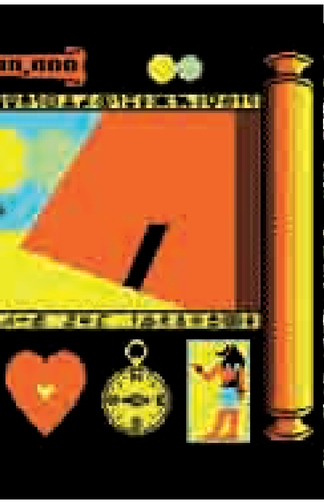
GRYZOR



PRINCE OF PERSIA

AMSTRAD CPC 464

It always came a poor third to the Spectrum and C64, but as the following games show, there were plenty of classics available for the 464. Before you write in, our top ten is bound to be subjective and open to violent debate, and that's what Retro Gamer is all about. Bring it on.



FANTASY WORLD DIZZY





GET DEXTER

PRINCE OF PERSIA

» **RELEASED:** 1990
» **PUBLISHED BY:** DOMARK/BRODERBUND
» **CREATED BY:** BRODERBUND
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** MYST

***Prince Of Persia* is quite possibly one of the most striking games to ever appear on Alan Sugar's 8-bit computer.** Released in 1990 it's a true revelation and easily showcases what the CPC can do when it's truly pushed. While the levels look sumptuous it's the staggering animation on the prince himself that truly impresses. Gameplay is just as good, with the prince perfectly responding to either the press of a joystick or stroke of a key. Who knows? If games like *Prince Of Persia* had appeared at the beginning of the CPC's life (and not god awful rubbish like *Bridge It*) things may have been quite different.

FANTASY WORLD DIZZY

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** CODEMASTERS
» **CREATED BY:** THE OLIVER TWINS
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** GRAND PRIX SIMULATOR

You can't feature an Amstrad top ten without at least one *Dizzy* game, so we've decided to plump for his third adventure that sees the intrepid hero exploring Fantasy World in search of girlfriend Daisy. Fantasy World is a big place however and Dizzy has to solve a variety of different puzzles and make his way past several ferocious enemies before he's finally reunited with his loved one. After the difficulty of *Treasure Island Dizzy* (you only got one life) *Fantasy World* is far more enjoyable to play – throw in some superior visuals and great puzzles and it's easy to see why the lovable character remains so popular.

HEAD OVER HEELS

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** JON RITMAN, BERNIE DRUMMOND
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** BATMAN

We've already featured Drummond and Ritman's classic in the Spectrum Perfect Ten Games, but we love it so much we had to include it here as well. Like *Get Dexter* it's one of the finest Isometric adventures that the Amstrad (or any other machine for that matter) has to offer, and remains as fresh as ever. Level design is near perfect, the interaction between the two characters is a stroke of genius and Drummond's creations feature more character in a few pixels than a dozen of today's gaming heroes can muster. One of the best adventures ever made.

GET DEXTER

» **RELEASED:** 1986
» **PUBLISHED BY:** PSS/ERE
» **CREATED BY:** ERE INFORMATIQUE
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** PACIFIC

Produced by French company ERE Informatique in 1986, Get Dexter/Crafton & Xunk really showed off the CPC's power by injecting both originality and humour into the isometric adventure, easily surpassing anything that Ultimate had produced on the CPC.

Get Dexter's graphics are superbly defined and colourful with it and your character can interact with virtually everything on screen. The playability is finely balanced between being frustratingly difficult and enormously enjoyable, the perfect learning curve.

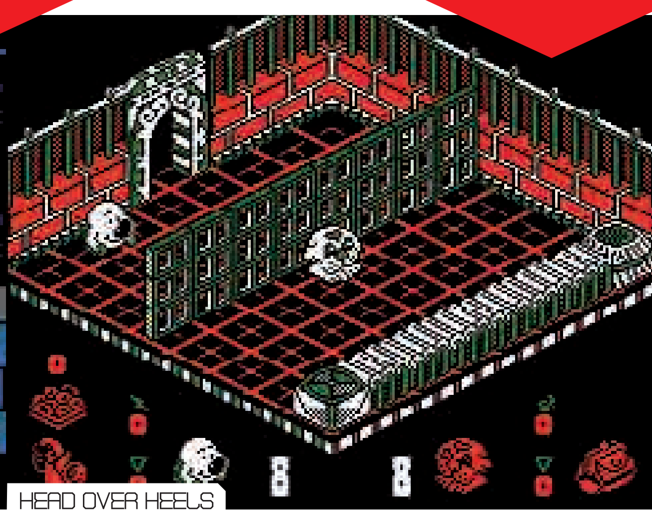
Visually stunning, Get Dexter is a true CPC classic.

CHASE HQ

» **RELEASED:** 1989
» **PUBLISHED BY:** OCEAN
» **CREATED BY:** JON O'BRIEN
» **BY THE SAME DEVELOPER:** NORTH STAR

On an unexpanded CPC 464, the digitised classic line delivered by your boisterous partner – "Let's Go, Mr Driver" – could not be heard. But that didn't detract from the gameplay of what was certainly a legendary CPC arcade conversion by Ocean. If there was one complaint about this game, it was that it got your adreneline pumping to the nth degree, making your palms sweaty as you closed in on the bad guy with the clock ticking perilously close to 'Game Over', and smoke pouring from beneath your tyres.The graphics were colourful and chunky, the speed, particularly when pressing the turbo, was surprisingly fast. Few games could match the pace, or indeed the action, of this game.

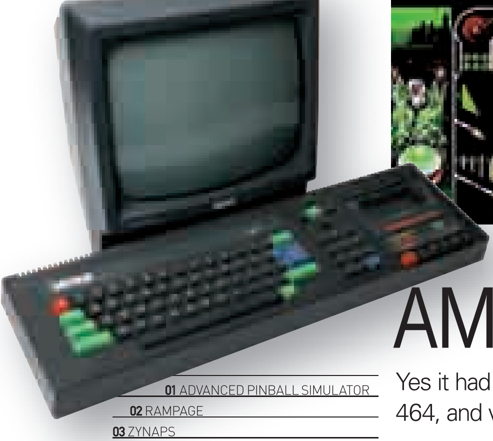


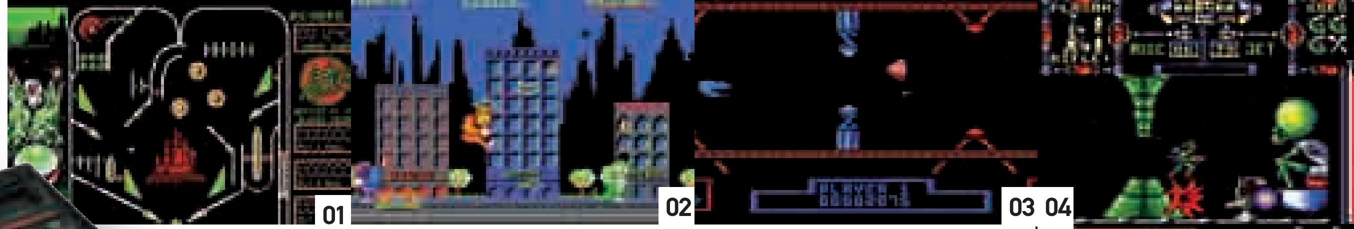


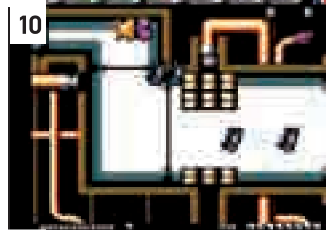
HEAD OVER HEELS



CHASE HQ







AMSTRAD CPC 464 and the rest…

Yes it had its fair share of detractors, but there were plenty of great games to love on the Amstrad CPC 464, and what's more, many of them weren't actually Spectrum conversions.

01 ADVANCED PINBALL SIMULATOR
02 RAMPAGE
03 ZYNAPS
04 DAN DARE III: THE ESCAPE
05 PIPE MANIA
06 DRILLER
07 RAINBOW ISLANDS
08 KUNG FU MASTER
09 SPINDIZZY
10 MONTY PYTHON'S FLYING CIRCUS
11 DIZZY
12 MATCH DAY II
13 BARBARIAN
14 JET SET WILLY
15 TRAILBLAZER
16 ALIENS
17 IKARI WARRIORS
18 WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
19 PLATOON
20 UN SQUADRON
21 CRAFTON & XUNK
22 KANE
23 BACTRON
24 TAPPER
25 PAC-LAND
26 CHUCKIE EGG
27 RENEGADE
28 ESCAPE FROM SINGE'S CASTLE
29 POSTMAN PAT 3
30 FANTASTIC VOYAGE
31 PRINCE OF PERSIA
32 COMMANDO
33 JACK THE NIPPER
34 PUZZNIC
35 CYBERNOID
36 KNIGHT LORE
37 SUPER MONACO GRAND PRIX
38 RAMBO: FIRST BLOOD PART II
39 IK+
40 CHASE HQ
41 BMX SIMULATOR
42 HOW TO BE A COMPLETE BASTARD
43 RICK DANGEROUS
44 FANTASY WORLD DIZZY
45 RUN THE GAUNTLET
46 SPACE HARRIER
47 PING PONG
48 GAME OVER
49 CASTLE MASTER
50 NEBULUS
51 SOLOMON'S KEY
52 HEAVY ON THE MAGIC
53 AFTER THE WAR
54 GRYZOR
55 SABRE WULF
56 OH MUMMY
57 FORGOTTEN WORLDS
58 BAT MAN
59 ROLAND ON THE ROPES
60 TURBO OUTRUN
61 WINTER GAMES
62 STAR WARS
63 CHICKEN CHASE
64 SHOCKWAY RIDER
65 ALIEN 8
66 USAGI YOJIMBO
67 ROBIN HOOD
68 HEAD OVER HEELS
69 DELIVERANCE: STORMLORD 2
70 HARRIER ATTACK
71 TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
72 REBELSTAR
73 BRIDGE IT
74 GHOSTBUSTERS
75 ROBOCOP
76 SAVAGE
77 SKWEEK
78 TARGET: RENEGADE
79 THE SCARED ARMOR OF ANTIRIAD
80 THE NEW ZEALAND STORY
81 POWER DRIFT
82 GAUNTLET II
83 MERCS
84 RICK DANGEROUS II
85 1942
86 FRUIT MACHINE SIMULATOR
87 OPERATION WOLF




05
06
07
08 09
11
12
13
14 15
BARBARIAN
20
21
22
23 24
29
30
31
32 33
38
39
40
41 42
COMPLETE-BASTARD
47
48
Castle Master
49
50 51
56
57
58
59 60
65
66
67
SCORE 002100 HEALTH 99
68 69
74
75
76
77 78
83
84
85
CASH-BASH
86 87

THE MAKING OF...

GHOSTBUSTERS

Ghostbusters was something of a revolution when it hit the Commodore 64. Many movie titles beforehand were tedious, cynical cash-ins that often shared little or no resemblance to the actual movie they were based on. David Crane's Ghostbusters was different and proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that busting really did make you feel good.



When you look back at the god-awful film and TV licences that came out on the early 8-bit computers, it's shocking to realise that many of them actually appeared after David Crane's delightful *Ghostbusters* and not before. Turds such as *Street Hawk*, *Knight Rider*, *Highlander* and *Miami Vice* – interestingly, all by Ocean – were just a few of the titles to make gamers curse with frustration; mainly because they shared little, or nothing in common with what they were actually supposed to be based on. Earlier systems such as the Atari 2600 fared little better, and while the odd enjoyable gem springs to mind on that system (*The Empire Strikes Back* being a reasonable example) it was hamstrung by some atrocious pieces of coding, the most memorable being Atari's infamous *ET: The Extra Terrestrial*.

"To be fair, the biggest problem with Atari's *ET* was the sheer cost of the licence," explains Crane when we ask him why so many licences failed to make the grade. "Atari had to sell around four million copies of the game just to break even. That would have been more games than any cartridge in history. Then you have the fact that the game itself was developed in record time – leaving the game designer very little time to ensure the game played well." So while *ET* is a more extreme example of a poor licence, it does highlight one crucial aspect that all licences do have in common – a ridiculously short development cycle. "You have to remember that there is usually no interest in an actual movie licence, until the movie itself is far enough along to generate some actual excitement," continues Crane. "And once a movie is finally released its excitement only lasts so long, so a videogame publisher has to identify a licence, negotiate a licence, design and program a game, then get cartridges manufactured and on the shelves before the movie is old news. When all of these tasks have to fit into a compressed schedule, it is the amount of time allocated to game design and programming that inevitably suffers."

When you have a schedule as tight as the above, it helps that all parts of your team are firing on all cylinders, and being able to spot a potential hit ahead of time is crucial for success. Step forward one Tom Lopez, then Vice President of Activison's Product Development who Crane gives full credit to



» Yet another slimer gets trapped – the *Ghostbusters* are in business

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** ACTIVISION
- » **DEVELOPER:** DAVID CRANE/ ACTIVISION
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1+

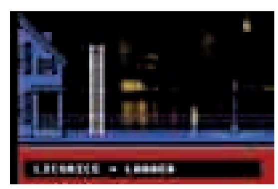


DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

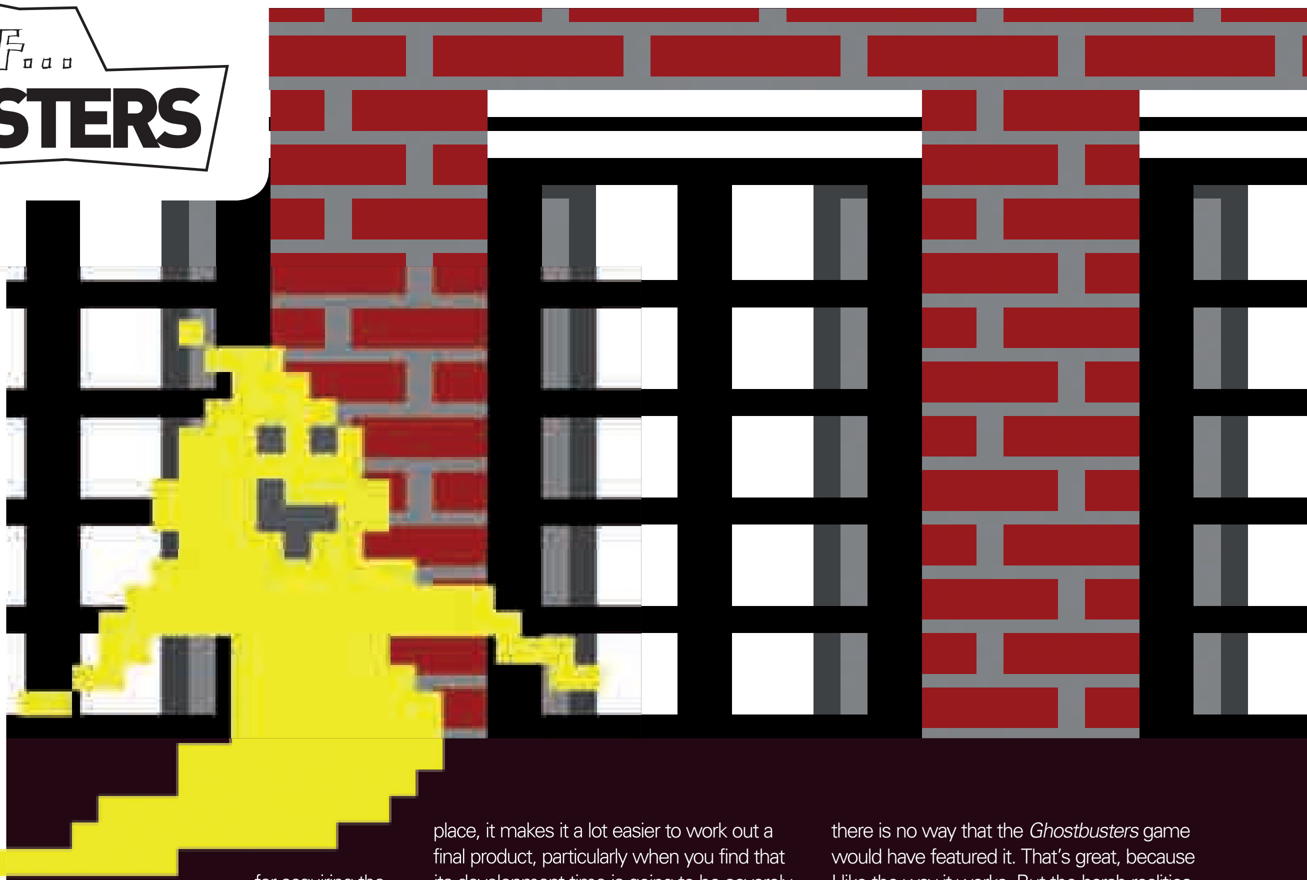
PITFALL!
SYSTEMS: ATARI 2600
YEAR: 1982

LITTLE COMPUTER PEOPLE
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1985

A BOY AND HIS BLOB
SYSTEMS: NES
YEAR: 1989



GHOSTBUSTERS



BETTER LATE THEN NEVER

With *Ghostbusters* being a huge hit on the Commodore 64 it was somewhat inevitable that it would begin to appear on many other systems. What's interesting though is the amount of time that passed before some of them were released. While versions for the Amstrad, Spectrum 48k (the 128k version had a superior soundtrack), MSX and Atari 2600 all appeared in 1985 the NES, Master System and Mega Drive titles didn't appear until a few years later. The Master System was first off the blocks with a rather solid update in 1987, the so-so NES version appearing a year later, and finally, the Mega Drive received its own version in 1990, six years after the original game was released, which was actually a rather cool little platformer with great replicas of the film's stars. With such a gap in systems, it's perhaps unsurprising to learn that Crane had very little to do with the later versions. "By the time a game is being ported to other platforms, the designer of the original game has long since moved on to another original project. This is exactly what happened with *Ghostbusters*."



for acquiring the lucrative licence before any other publisher expected it to be a hit. "When choosing movie licences for videogames you have to catch a licence early if you have any hope of making a good deal financially," Crane continues, clearly warming to the subject. "A good example is that of Acclaim when it signed the rights for *The Simpsons* when it was still a small feature on the Tracy Ulmann show."

Nowadays film licences can be a tricky proposition with anything from the film studio to the actual movie's stars calling the shots on how the game is finally realised. Fortunately for Crane, things were not quite so hands-on back in 1984 and the talented programmer found himself with a surprising amount on freedom, for what was to be such a big licence. There were no requests from Columbia to make a specific type of game, there were no rules or stipulations in place that meant Crane's already short development time would be further decreased, he was simply allowed to get on with it. A deal that suited Crane perfectly. "I had a script and some storyboards, and that was enough," he confirms. "My personal opinion on how to design a licenced game is this: Design an original game that works within the THEME of the actual licence. Don't try to make the movie into a game… make a game that borrows from the look and feel of the movie." Of course, when you already have some game mechanics in place, it makes it a lot easier to work out a final product, particularly when you find that its development time is going to be severely cut down.

"When Tom Lopez determined that the *Ghostbusters* licence was available and that he could get it for a reasonable price, he came to the game design group," continues Crane. "He told us, 'this licence is available. To make financial sense we will have to make a game in six weeks (as opposed to the normal nine months). What can we do?' We all agreed that if we had to start a game from scratch we could not do a quality game in the necessary timeframe." Luckily for Lopez, Crane had already been toying with a game called *Car Wars* that featured a resource-allocation segment where players could buy different armaments for their cars from the money they had earned on levels. *Car Wars* was also due to feature a top-view racing segment that would combine both racing and shooting. Needless to say, the seeds of an idea were quickly formulating in Crane's mind.

"One of the coolest props from the movie was the hearse-turned-ghostmobile," laughs Crane, clearly enjoying the trip down memory lane. "I could picture how to wrap the theme of this new movie around my existing game, with the minimum amount of effort. I kept the top-view racing game and replaced the guns, missiles, and rocket launchers with more appropriate 'weapons' such as the Ghost Vacuum. Ultimately though, if the base game *Car Wars* hadn't contained a resource-allocation segment, there is no way that the *Ghostbusters* game would have featured it. That's great, because I like the way it works. But the harsh realities of development schedules have a major impact on game features. It always has and it always will."

Obviously Crane is being rather generous in how easily *Ghostbusters* came together. While the structure was in place, and many of the game mechanics had been decided, what lay ahead was six weeks of incredibly hard graft that saw Crane and the rest of the team working around the clock in order to meet their stringent deadline. "Obviously, *Ghostbusters* could have been a much better game with more development time," concedes Crane, "but if it missed the window of opportunity it would not have been the commercial success that it became. And Crane's tip for looking out for a commercial success? "Look for the sequels," he laughs, "No unsuccessful game has ever been followed by a sequel."

Keen to learn how Crane would have improved on an already enjoyable game our eagerness had to wait as Crane was now in full flow… "Here's a tip for game designers I like to call: 'How to deal with a tight deadline.' Complete a full game as quickly as possible, and then go back and enhance until they pry the code from your hands. After that, STOP adding features and only fix bugs, or you'll simply fall victim to 'creeping elegance'. Give your game a beginning, middle, and an end. If the code-release deadline comes and all you have is a fully playable and beautifully tweaked main game, all of your work is



» Before you started busting you had to equip your car with the right equipment



"IT WAS ALWAYS A CHALLENGE MAKING THINGS LOOK RECOGNISABLE ON THE 8-BIT CONSOLES"
DAVID CRANE





» As you drove to your next location it was possible to suck up stray ghosts

commercially worthless! That game can't be released.

Implement the complete game flow, from the time the player boots up until the final congratulations screen. Do this first, even if the fun part – the main gameplay sequence – is nothing but a placeholder. Second, make the game really fun but leave out neat little enhancements that might take a day or two to code. Then in the last weeks of a project, revisit each part of the sequence based on greatest need and add the cool little ideas that have been percolating in your brain.

The result is that near the end of the allocated time you have an average, but complete game that has at least some commercial value even before it has all the coolest tweaks. But since everybody knows that a great game sells better than an average game, you have the leverage to show your publisher that you can improve the game with each subsequent day they can give you.

I did this with the *Ghostbusters* title (as I do with all my games). I spent every hour that the schedule allowed tweaking the game, and it came out OK in the end. I could have done a lot more, but in the final analysis it seems to have been enough."

It certainly did seem to be enough, as *Ghostbusters* proved to be a massive hit for both Activision and Columbia, but was Crane concerned that such an effects-laden movie would translate well to an 8-bit home computer? "Not at all," he tells us. "If you think about it, it wasn't the special effects that made the movie enjoyable, nor would special effects make the game more playable. Modern console games often fall into the trap of substituting effects for gameplay. It was much easier for us in the Eighties to avoid that trap because the hardware was so much more limiting than what is on the market today. You set out to design a fun game, and you put in as many cool effects as you could without compromising the fun."

One notable aspect of Crane's *Ghostbusters*, was that, unlike many of his previous titles, it was released on the C64 first and then ported over to the Atari 2600, which by then Crane declares as "being history". Despite Crane's frank statement, he still holds a torch for Atari's popular console. "The Atari 2600 was the most challenging system to program in history, and I loved it," he tells us. "As a puzzle-solver I derived great satisfaction from making the 2600 do things that its designers had never intended. The Commodore 64 on the other hand was far simpler. On one hand that allowed me to spend more time on gameplay and less on display difficulties. But in missing the challenge I would often try to make the Commodore 64 do unusual things. Why else would my first C64 game be able to talk?

Ah yes, *Ghostbusters*' now infamous speech. Whilst not the first game to offer digitised speech – that honour goes to Williams' *Sinistar* – it was certainly a chatty

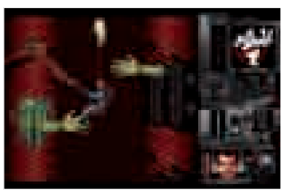
GHOSTBUSTERS

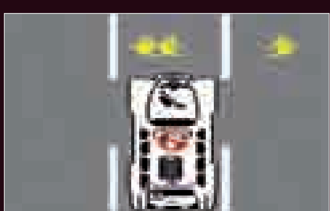


» As the PK energy built up in the city the ghosts became more and more numerous

WHO YOU GONNA CALL? THE OLIVER BROTHERS...

With David Crane unavailable for *Ghostbusters II*, Activision needed somebody else to create a follow-hit for the 1989 sequel. Several talented developers worked on various versions of the game with the Oliver Twins taking care of the Spectrum and Amstrad conversions. The actual game featured a variety of different playing styles, and whilst the graphics and sound were far superior, it didn't quite have the charm of the original game. "I prefer to break new ground with my game designs," replies Crane when we question him about why he wasn't involved with the sequel. "In the rare case of a sequel, such as *Pitfall II*, I was trying to accomplish things never before seen in a game. So if I work on a sequel it is more a matter of working an original game that happens to share a theme with another game."





» There was a fair amount of flickering, but the Amstrad conversion was pretty good



little title. "Midway through development, I decided it was important to add digitized speech to the game," explains Crane. "Some of the trendiest things to come from the movie were sound bytes such as 'He slimed me' and the crowd chanting 'Ghostbusters!' I felt the sounds helped to capture the spirit of the movie (pun intended) so I decided to keep them in."

Of course, you can't mention *Ghostbusters*' impressive sound without giving its fantastic rendition of the theme tune a mention. "*Ghostbusters* music was a masterful job of orchestration using the limited (by today's standards) music capability of the Commodore 64," insists Crane. "Russell Lieblich created a theme song so true to the original that if Columbia had any concerns about its authenticity they were never voiced to me. In fact, once I heard Russell's excellent rendition I just HAD to feature it as the lead-in to the game."

Not only did Ray Parker Junior's hit play at the beginning of the game, it was also accompanied by the actual words, so fans could sing along to their hearts' content. A nice touch that's rarely seen in today's blockbusters. "That was a great example of collaboration," explains Crane when we ask him how it originated. "The music was perfect – so much so that I felt it deserved to be featured. I pictured the sing-along screen – including the digitized crowd chanting "Ghostbusters!" But I didn't have the time to write the code. I passed it over to Garry Kitchen and his game design crew with the request to make a follow-the-bouncing-ball sequence to go along with the music. They did a great job on the implementation, and I was able to add it into the game at the very last minute. A reviewer of the day had this to say about the game – referring, I believe, to that particular feature – 'never before have I so thoroughly enjoyed playing or even watching a game as entertaining as this one.'"

While creating the sound was relatively straightforward, creating the game's adversaries wasn't quite as simple. "It was always a challenge making things look recognisable on the 8-bit consoles," admits Crane. "There were actually times where a game design had to change because the on-screen objects that I wanted couldn't actually be drawn. I finally reached the point where I would tell the artists that I'd need some animals, some insects, and treasures. I left it up to them to draw a bunch of things and I picked the ones that looked the best. The ghosts were just as difficult, if not more so. The character artist on the project, Hillary Mills, did a lot of experimenting to make the ghosts look like ghosts. There's a little bit of Casper's cousins as well as influences from the movie in the final art. And, of course, there was the whole transparency issue. But overall I liked all the ghosts that we finally settled upon."

With the graphics and sound in place, it's time to return to what made *Ghostbusters* so fun in the first place: it's varied gameplay. Crane's hit has a masterful blend of different play mechanics ranging from simple resource management, to driving, to action. How did he manage to get the balance just right? "One way to achieve deeper gameplay is to intersperse multiple levels requiring differing player skills," Crane tells us. "Otherwise you run the risk of boring the gameplayer. One thing to remember is that during the development of a game, the designer plays portions of the game thousands of times over. If we can make a game that is not boring to ourselves, it might just stand the test of time with consumers as well. So mixing different styles of play is good on many different levels. Masterful? Maybe. But good game design philosophy? Definitely." This was no more apparent than when you headed off to capture each new ghost. Rather than simply arrive at your next location, trap in hand, you drove to it (and in a nice touch, could suck up nearby ghosts if your car had the relevant equipment). "One of the hardest things to do in a game design is to segue between levels or tasks. You want to create a transition that makes sense and keeps the player immersed in whatever fantasy you have created for him. So ironically, the driving sequence fits perfectly between the game's ghost-catching levels. It also tied into the story line and gave the game the appearance of conforming to a sequence of events – something we have come to expect from movies."

Considering how solid the finished game was, it's surprising to discover that there were plenty of elements that Crane would have liked to fix if he had received extra development time. The sections that saw you capturing Slimers was to have different



"LOOK FOR THE SEQUELS; NO UNSUCCESSFUL GAME HAS EVER BEEN FOLLOWED BY A SEQUEL"
DAVID CRANE

ghosts and tasks; Crane had also envisioned there to be much more going on around the city map and wanted to add many more different accessories to your car.

Ultimately though, everything turned out just fine, but was there anything in the final game that Crane wasn't happy about? "I always wanted to change the victory screen," he admits. "Every game has to have one, and in a perfect world it should be something spectacular. After all, the player has just completed a game that can take hours; he should be rewarded for it. But in the grand scheme of resource allocation, considering schedule, artist's time, programmer's time, and memory (ROM, RAM, disk space), a scene viewed only once per game is really not that important.

In *Ghostbusters*, at the end of the game you cross the streams (which is supposed to potentially bring about the end of the universe), and what you get is the door to the other dimension closing. Game Over… Big Deal. I expect players to be disappointed with it. Sadly, to really beef up that one sequence would have taken memory and artist's time away from the main game. It would have effectively diminished the game. As a game designer I make decisions on those tradeoffs dozens, if not hundreds of times for every game I design."

So there you have it, a licenced game, made in just six weeks that was actually pretty damn good (unlike many other licences we've had to endure over the years). Even today, *Ghostbusters* remains an enjoyable (if aged) title to play and before Crane left we wanted to know why he felt the game has endured over the years.

"Nostalgia is a powerful force. The movie was a blockbuster, and it was just so funny that you can't help but like anything that was associated with it. The game was a good one, although certainly not my best work ever. And for most of us, the time in our lives when we played *Ghostbusters* for the first time was a simpler time with mostly fond memories."



» If too many of your Ghostbusters were slimed simply head back to HQ and recruit some more

FLASHBACK



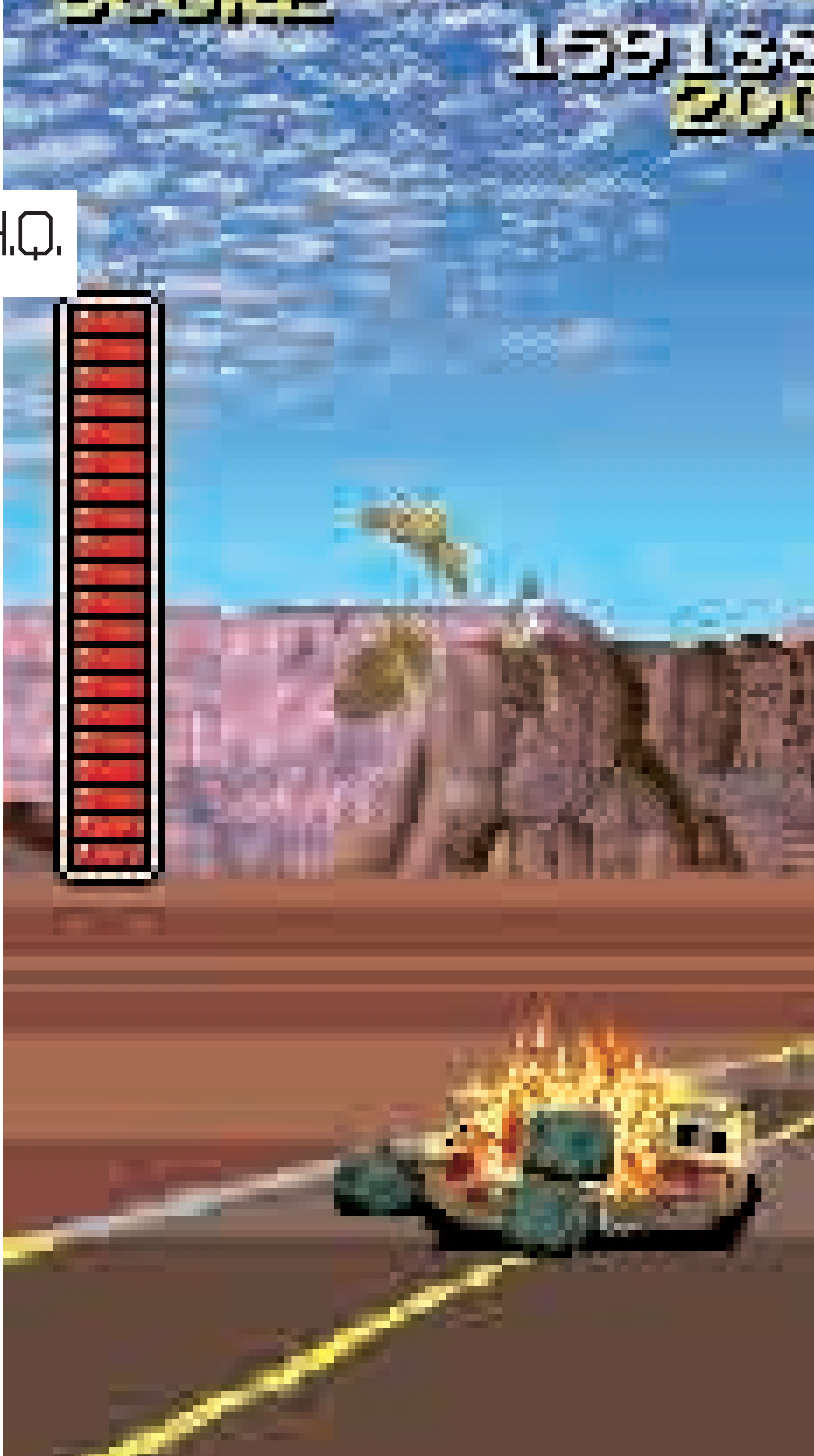
- » **FILM:** GHOSTBUSTERS
- » **YEAR RELEASED:** 1984
- » **DIRECTED BY:** IVAN REITMAN
- » **STARRING:** BILL MURRAY, DAN AYKROYD, HAROLD RAMIS, SIGOURNEY WEAVER
- » **WATCH IT NOW ON:** DVD

When Ivan Reitman saw Dan Aykroyd's original draft for *Ghostbusters*, set in a near future where competing, interplanetary ghosts and monster-catching firms compete for business, he could see the massive potential for comedy posed by the underlying premise of the script. He suggested setting the film in contemporary New York around a University, while maintaining the essential comedic principle of three naive experts attempting to go into business for themselves. Harold Ramis was brought in as a writer (then later cast as Spengler), and the three of them refashioned the concept into the film we now know and love.

The cast and crew have always maintained they knew the movie was going to be big. When working on a script of such imaginative quality, populated by some of the finest comedians and film makers available, there's no point pretending the result would be anything less than incredible. *Ghostbusters* had it all: big money special effects, action, originality and, most importantly, laughs.

Very few films have ever succeeded in transcending genre the way this film did, creating an immediate cult icon involving every aspect of its production from prop and costume, through character design to the funkadelic soundtrack. Overnight, *Ghostbusters* became an essential part of 20th Century heritage.



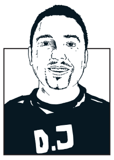


CHASE H.Q.

"LET'S GO MR DRIVER"



- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **RELEASED:** 1988
- » **GENRE:** DRIVING
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ARCADE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £400+



HISTORY

It's amazing to think that we first played Taito's *Chase H.Q.* nearly two decades ago, and that 18 years later it remains a fantastic driving experience.

Yu Suzuki's *OutRun* may have made driving games cool again, but it was Taito's wonderful cops 'n' robbers title that put the fun back into the racing genre. Sure, we could cynically suggest that it poached plenty of ideas from Sega's iconic racer: splits in road… check, radio at start of game… check, partner driving with you… check, but Taito's masterstroke was to include another factor to race against, namely a dangerous criminal.

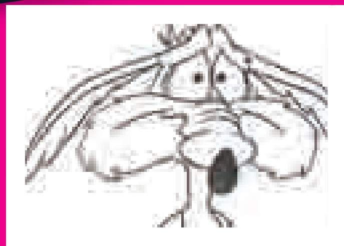
While most games of the time gave you a strict time limit to race against, *Chase H.Q.* went one better and presented you with a devilishly tricky criminal to bring to justice as well. The only way for you and your vocal partner to bring the perp to justice was to continually ram into his beautiful car until it was nothing more than a smouldering wreck.

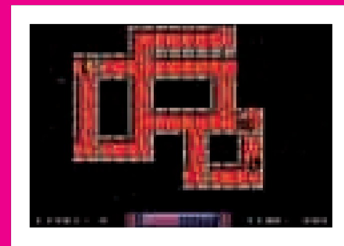
Of course, this was easier said then done, as the roads were filled with a range of colourful vehicles and your opponent always seemed to have a better drive than your souped up Porsche 928. Still, the thrill was in the hunt and *Chase H.Q.*'s remains one of the most exhilarating we've ever participated in. Ramming into the back of a Lamborghini, while your co-pilot pleads you to 'push it more, just a little more' still can't be beat (although the satisfying whirr as your turbo boosts kick in comes pretty close) – it remains one of gaming's ultimate adrenalin rushes.

In fact, our biggest issue with Taito's racer is that we're unlikely to ever see it on a compilation (and yes, we're well aware that some of the 8-bit versions were pretty damned good). Sadly, due to licensing issues and the nature of the game (companies don't like you smashing their cars up) it would simply cost too much money in licensing fees for publishers to worry about it. Still, at least there's 'Pursuit Mode' in *Burnout Legends*…

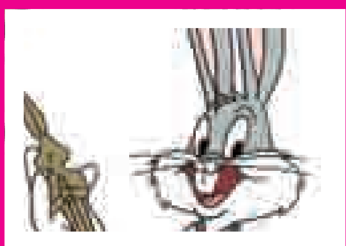


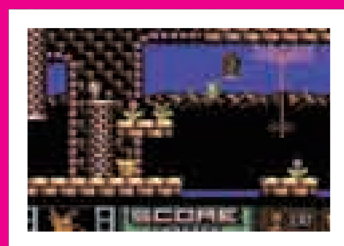
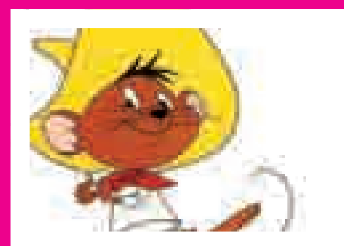
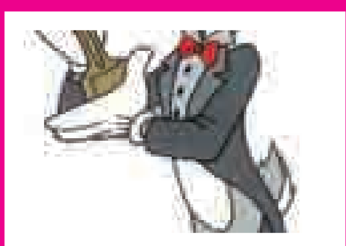
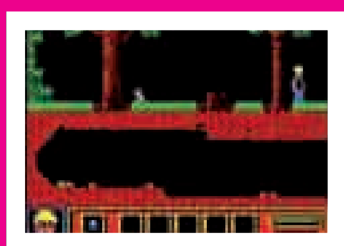
HI-TEC SOFTWARE

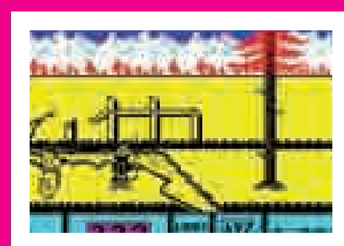



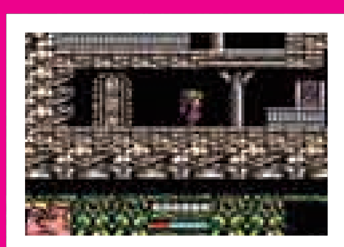



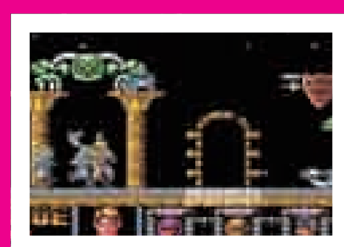
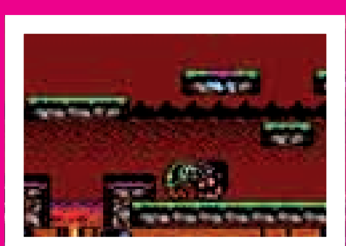
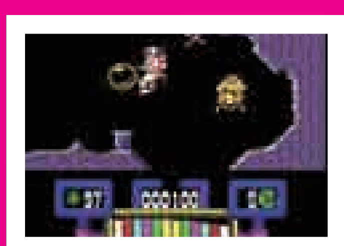
DESPITE ITS SMALL SIZE HI-TEC SOF MANAGED TO SECURE SOME COLOS CARTOON LICENCES. HERE'S HOW…

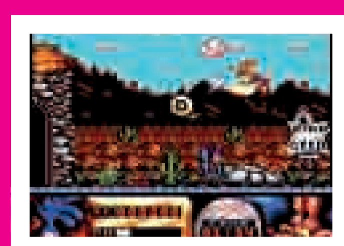






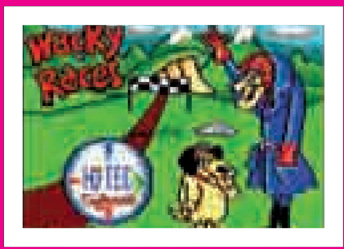






TWARE
SAL

Yogi was smarter than the average bear. Dave Palmer, creator of budget house Hi-Tec, was faster and more cunning than many of his rivals. And while Yogi walked away with picnic baskets, Dave snapped up lucrative deals with Hannah Barbera and Warner Bros. David Crookes looks at how Hi-Tec put these licences to use.



Britain has been blessed with many top software houses from Codemasters to Ocean, Gremlin to US Gold. Among these big players there have been so many little guys, that they tend to be forgotten. One of these is Hi-Tec. Run by just a handful of people, it was prolific and created some solid games, primarily based around licences snapped up from top cartoon makers Hanna Barbera and Warner Bros.

The Hi-Tec story began in 1977 when electronics buff and entrepreneur Dave Palmer set up a business in Sheffield called Palmer Acoustics Limited, dealing mainly with high end hi-fi and studio equipment.

As an ex-RAF aircraft engineer, he was interested in technology and, while running his business, he began to become familiar with the advancement of the home micro. Although he spent some time looking at the wholesale import and productions of computer components as a way of moving his business forward, he instead decided to turn his attentions towards videogames.

And by 1982, he had joined forces with his ex-wife's cousin, Mike Mahoney, who had formed Alligata Software, having also been fascinated by this emerging industry.

Hi-Tec's games were written by teenagers. Dave would pick them up from school at lunchtime to knock out a few lines of code before driving them back to class.

And when he wasn't watching kids tap out memorable games for the Spectrum, C16, C64 and BBC – including the hit *Blagger*, inspired by *Manic Miner*, *Defender*-conversion *Guardian* and *Who Dares Wins II* – Dave spent his time handling the sales and public relations, while getting his hands dirty with design, the duplication of tapes, the checking of artwork, game testing and packing.

That continued until October 1986, when Dave left and started Alternative Software with Roger Hulley, running the production side in Sheffield and sales in Pontefract. The company did well – Gallup named it as the number one volume publisher the year after, but by 1988, with stacks of videogaming experience, he decided to go it alone.

At first, he set up PAL Developments, producing many games for Virgin Software including *Sidewinder II* and *Bomb Fusion*, but in 1989, Hi-Tec was born as Dave's first publishing house and the sole outlet for PAL Developments titles.

Hi-Tec was a small outfit with only a handful of staff, including general programmer Dave Thompson, the Spectrum specialist, Gary Antcliffe, the 16-bit programmer who also worked on the C64, and Richard Morton, the graphic artist.

Dave Palmer remained the boss and everyone else was beneath him. "There was no real hierarchy but it worked," Morton says.

As well as creating the pixel art, Richard also carried out the map design, tile sets, animated characters, loading screens, and panel graphics. There was a play tester called Pete Thrith and, later on, the staff expanded to include marketing man Dave Allington, illustrator Julie Allington and other programmers such as Nigel Speight.

At first, Hi-Tec knocked out a few titles such as *Future Bike Simulator* and *Boulder Dash 4*. But when the company secured a deal with Hannah Barbera, the firm's fortunes began to take off, as Hi-Tec had recognisable names with which to sell its games.

Morton says: "I don't know the exact details of how Dave managed this deal, but I do know he was great at seeing a good thing and getting in early. Basically he was at the right place at the right time and I think we slipped in under the radar and snapped the licences from under the noses of all the big players. He secured the Hanna Barbera deal and also the huge Looney Tunes deal which was exclusively on tape, floppy and CD format too – way ahead of its time."

The rights enabled Hi-Tec to make games from any cartoon in the Hanna Barbera and Looney Tunes stables. As part of the deal, Hannah Barbera and Warner (which had previously done deals with Atari) were keen to ensure its intellectual property was protected.

IN THE KNOW

In brief: Dave Palmer, following success with Alligata Software and Alternative, decides to go it alone, creating Hi-Tec in 1989. Soon, he has deals with top cartoon makers Hanna Barbera and Warner Bros under his belt and his small team go on to create a wealth of animation-inspired games, all made available at budget prices. But, despite the success of *Yogi Bear* and *Hong Kong Phooey*, the label died in 1992.





» The first Warner Bros title for Hi-Tec, featuring the familiar drawings from the cartoon, making the game attractive to impulse buyers

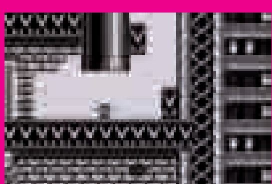


» As the graphic artists for all formats of games produced by Hi-Tec, Richard Morton was a very busy man

HI-TEC SOFTWARE

DEJA VU?

The short amount of time the coders at Hi-Tec had to create their games meant a little bit of economising occured with some of their titles.
For example, a strange-looking mushroom on legs was an enemy in both *Potsworth & Co* and *Scooby and Scrappy Doo* on the Spectrum (look carefully at these pictures and you'll see the same smiley face peering back at you). Scenery would also be repeated in many of Hi-Tec's games and the same sound effects could often be heard. Luckily, the gameplay didn't suffer, particularly with *Potsworth* and *Scooby* – indeed these were two of Hi-Tec's best games, proving that graphics are not everything.
"We only had between three and six months to complete a project across multiple platforms," reveals Morton. "Looking back I really don't know how we did it, but we did."







» As well as creating games for the 8-bits, Hi-Tec also converted titles to the Atari ST and Amiga





» An advertisement from Hi-Tec showing off its array of licences while plugging its more unique games

To ensure things go off on the right foot, Hi-Tec's programming team decided to use pre-existing stories from the cartoons. That way, the bosses at the animation studios would not be able to take issue with the fundamentals of the game.

The crew would first discuss what they were dealing with, going through the basics of the character and getting an idea of what they wanted. They would then grab a video and use it as the basis of the storyboard in much the same way as programmers handling film licences would work. That would be approved by Hanna Barbera and the programmers would get on with the task in hand.

It led to games such as *Top Cat: Beverly Hills Cat*, taken from the video *Top Cat* in Beverly Hills, and *Yogi's Great Escape*, inspired by the video of the same name. But the studio's involvement would not end there: it wanted to see every part of the game before it would give it the ok, approving graphics and making alterations, trying to pack as much of the cartoons into a game as possible. "I remember my first licence title: *Hong Kong Phooey* on the Spectrum," continues Morton. Creating the likeness of the title character was hard, especially in 32x24 pixels in two colours. Man, that was difficult – but I soon got the hang of it. There was a guy from Hanna Barbera called Les Skinner who would visit the office once or twice a year and go through the list of changes with me, which was hard at first but soon got easier. Towards the end we got on really well. He personally knew William Hanna and Joseph Barbera so it was an honour to work with him."

Some of the changes did frustrate Richard, however. "They would frequently give comments like 'the colour of Yogi's tie should be green and not brown like the rest of him' which on a Speccy was pretty impossible to fix. Or they'd say 'the pixel on the end of Daffy's nose needs to go one pixel to the left'. I guess that was their job and in all honesty made me a better artist for it."

Magazines took to Hi-Tec and the majority of the games were given favourable reviews. Journalists were astounded that a softie so small could be so prolific. "The magazines appreciated the quality we were managing with such a small team," Richard says.

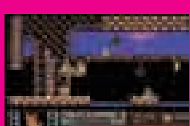
"Whenever a magazine visited Hi-Tec they couldn't believe how small we actually were as a developer and publisher."

In each case, the 8-bit versions would be created first. They would be written on Atari STs and then ported. Thompson would use a conversion utility and Richard would use DPaint. It enabled the programmers to speed up the time it took when creating a game. Most of them took between three and six months to create.

Hi-Tec was sent books filled with sketch sheets and drawings of characters in different poses from which Richard would create the main sprites. The firm was also told not to kill characters. They could be put to sleep or made to sit, but they were not allowed to die.

More of a constraint, though, was the fact the music from the cartoons was only licensed to Hanna Barbera for use in its animations. It means the games could not contain this copyright material, even though Hi-Tec used samples in the 16-bit versions of the games, which were written last.

"The licences we had were great," continues Morton. "I was having so much fun creating and animating characters such as Yogi Bear, Top Cat, Scooby Doo, Daffy Duck and Bugs Bunny. The worst part of the job was the end of project overtime, which any

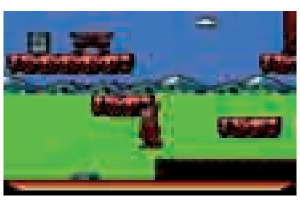


FINEST HOUR

SCOOBY DOO AND SCRAPPY DOO

This wonderful budget platformer looked and felt like a full price title. You played as Scrappy, solving puzzles, avoiding poisonous flowers and dog-eating venus fly-traps while bashing the hell out of ghosts, zombies and vampires to rescue your uncle Scooby. Lush graphics, excellent sound and superb gameplay made this a winner.

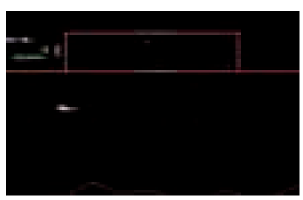
GAMES REVIEWS



YOGI'S GREAT ESCAPE

HI-TECH (1990)

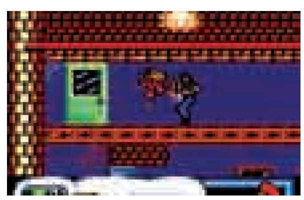
» Everyone's favourite smart bear with a penchant for picnic baskets was given some devastating news: Jellystone Park was to close. Worse – he was told all the animals would have to move to the zoo. So, together with Boo Boo, he decides to escape. The player joined Yogi and Boo Boo on this six-level journey, collecting bonuses along the way. Animation was spot on and it made for a solid Hi-Tec platform game. **60%**



GUARDIANS 2

HI-TECH (1990)

» As a *Defender* clone, *Guardians 2* looked basic and didn't really add anything to the genre. Tiny sprites and confusing graphics made the job of attacking enemy waves and defending those on the ground even more difficult. It was also frustratingly easy to die. By opting for a confusing control option, the game was tiresome and you certainly didn't want to continue playing as level after level blurred into one. **40%**



HONG KONG PHOOEY

HI-TECH (1990)

» Who could fail to love Hong Kong Phooey, the kung-fu athletic dog? Not us. And this game had fun written all over it. This platformer saw you beat up the bad guys while jumping around platforms and flicking switches. On some versions, Phooey doesn't so much as climb up and down stairs as float and the sound effects are terrible but this kind of added to the cartoon charm. All in all, an addictive must-play game. **70%**



INSPECTOR HECTI AT THE INTERCHANGE

HI-TECH (1991)

» Like a throwback to the early Eighties, *Inspector Hecti* had 50 levels to play through, looked superb and proved to be a great game. You whizzed around the levels, trying to avoid bad guys while trying to move part of the maze to outfox them. It had a back-to-basics feel, which kept you going back for more and more. It had lastability and, thankfully, came with passwords every five levels. **70%**



» Warner Bros was very particular about how its characters would be used in games and sent Hi-Tec a book of expressions and movements. Sometimes it suggested phrases, such as with Speedy and Bugs

"WE WERE A SMALL TEAM OF TALENTED GUYS WHO LOVED TO MAKE AND PLAY GAMES. IT WAS, AND STILL IS, LIKE GETTING PAID TO DO YOUR HOBBY"

company has to endure, but I was young and naive back then and it really hurt."

Hi-Tec was in the unique position of not having any rival budget companies working on the same style of game – "I suppose the closest rival we had was Codemasters and its *Dizzy* range," muses Richard - and this helped propel it into the Top 10.

Such success meant the team was able, at times, to branch out into non-licensed games, coming up with their own characters and ideas. Among these were *Turbo The Tortoise, Blazing Thunder* and *Alien World*.

Like the licences, the design cycle on these games was quick. They would thrash out a main game-overview-document listing the games' key features, controls and story. The map design was done on the fly with everyone playing levels as they became available. If they worked, they would progress. If they didn't the process would start over.

"We all came up with the ideas for our own games, either because someone has written a piece of code for a vertical smooth scroll like with *Blazing Thunder* or simply because we wanted to make a particular original game," continues Morton. "We would also get game demos in from small developers which Dave would then licence and fund development such as *Alien World* C-64 and then we would create the high end Amiga versions in-house."

Although Hi-Tec began selling its games for just £2.99, it eventually followed the rest of the budget industry by upping the price to £3.99, starting with *Top Cat*. Hi-Tec explained the rise as giving the firm an extra 20 or 30 pence in revenue that it ploughed into spending a couple of extra weeks on a game.

As the company continued to churn out games, they became better and better. The last, *Daffy Duck*, was given 94% in Zzap!64, although it wasn't released. This is because Hi-Tec began to run into problems with cash and the loss of key staff. Thompson left in 1992. And Gary and Richard left together six months later to join Core (Gary left Core not long after and is now believed to be living in America).

PAL Developments was unaffected and began creating games for other labels. It became David A Palmer Productions knocking out titles primarily for Nintendo, continuing a cartoon theme with *Speedy Gonzales* for the Game Boy in 1993 and later *Taz Mania* and *Dennis The Menace*. A SNES version of *Speedy* was also produced.

That firm continues to create games, creating a wealth of titles including *Earthworm Jim, Men In Black 2* and *Doom GBA*.

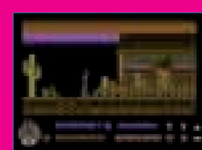
So any tears over Hi-Tec? "Looking back, the most fun aspect for me was the people I was working with," says Richard, who has just finished working on the PS2 and PSP versions of *Tomb Raider*: 10th Anniversary Edition for Core Design. "We were a small team of talented guys who loved to make and play games. It was, and still is, like getting paid to do your hobby."

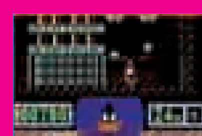
But would he have changed anything? "Maybe I would have pushed for more pay rises but that's about it," he laughs."

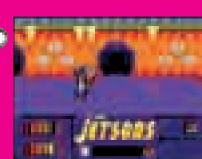


WHERE'S THE GAME, DOC?

When Hi-Tec closed in 1992, games vanished with it. Among them were *Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, Speedy Gonzales* and *James Bond Junior*.
Of these, *Daffy Duck* was complete (and reviewed by Zzap!64, receiving 94%) and *Bugs Bunny* was almost done. It is thought the remaining two were far from finished.
Daffy was a multi-load platform game with brilliant graphics, and a great main character. It is believed a master copy of this game is still out there somewhere; it remains one of the most sought-after games in history. There has been more luck with the four-level platformer *Bugs Bunny: Private Detective*, which the brilliant Games That Weren't website (www.gtw64.co.uk) has available for download.





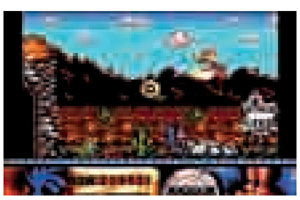




TOP CAT: BEVERLEY HILLS CATS

HI-TECH [1991]

» Called *Boss Cat* in the UK because there was a cat food called Top Cat, this Sixties cartoon from Hanna Barbera didn't translate well. Split into three parts, the game set TC a series of challenges: to find four gang members and shuffle past a guard dog, to get past Officer Dibble, and to enter a plush mansion and rescue pal Benny. The game looked the part but was dull and a bit too big. **50%**



ROAD RUNNER AND WILE E COYOTE

HI-TECH [1991]

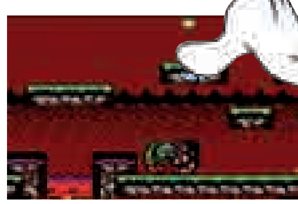
» This was the first Warner Bros Looney Tunes game to be released by Hi-Tec. It had good graphics, but was an average title. You had to move Road Runner around a single screen under a time limit, pecking at piles of bird seed while avoiding lightning bolts, worms, mice and, of course, Wild E Coyote. You'd then to a chase involving the Coyote, which was quite simple to finish. Not the best. **45%**



POTSWORTH

HI-TECH [1992]

» As one of Hi-Tec's best games, this game had a slightly higher than normal price tag (£6.99 on tape). At first glance, it was Hi-Tec's standard platforming fare and each of the five levels were similar, but once you began to play, the progressive challenge of this title quickly became gripping. The only downside was that, frustratingly, when you died, you had to restart the entire game since there were no passwords. **88%**



TURBO THE TORTOISE

HI-TECH [1992]

» *Turbo* was quite a departure for Hi-Tec since it was one of the softie's rare non-licensed titles. And it didn't suffer at all from it. In fact, this game looked good and played like a dream, spread over six levels on a journey through history (from prehistoric times to ice age, Egyptian, medieval, 20th Century and future). It was a platformer, but had a great sideways scroller with lots of extras such as a new weapon on each level. **90%**

AVOID LIKE THE PLAGUE

THE JETSONS

This cartoon was always a second-rate *Flintstones* but surely Hi-Tec could have done it better justice than this tedious travesty. Is that rectangular sprite really George Jetson? And what? The game is about him wanting time off work to go for a picnic with his family? Geez. Five levels, all dull. Do not play!

ARCADE Inspection



» There's still no perfect conversion of *VF2*. Even the recent PS2 version didn't match the arcade original

SEGA MODEL 2

FROM THE DAWN OF THE VIDEOGAME INDUSTRY THE ARCADES HAVE PLAYED A MAJOR PART IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF GAMING AND NO ARCADE SYSTEM HAS BEEN MORE INFLUENTIAL THAN SEGA'S MODEL 2. ASHLEY DAY EXPLAINS HOW A MILITARY RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT COMPANY KICK-STARTED THE MODERN ERA OF 3D GAMING.

STATS

YEAR OF PRODUCTION:
1993

YEAR OF DISCONTINUATION:
1999

ORIGINAL MANUFACTURER:
SEGA

ASSOCIATED DEVELOPERS:
SEGA, TECMO, PSIKYO, JALECO, REAL 3D

SPECS:
MAIN CPU: INTEL I960-KB @ 25 MHZ
GRAPHICS CO-PROCESSOR: FUJITSU TGP MB86234 FPU
SOUND CPU: 16BITS 68000 @ 10MHZ
SOUND CHIP: 2 X CUSTOM 28 CHANNEL PCM CHIPS
AUDIO RAM: 540 KILOBYTES

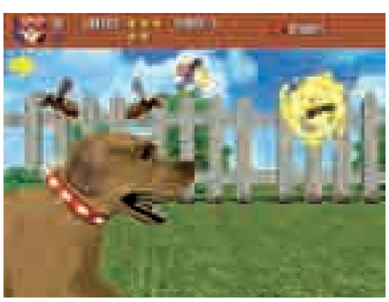

» Japanese gamers don't sit next to each other when playing two-player games. Who knows why?

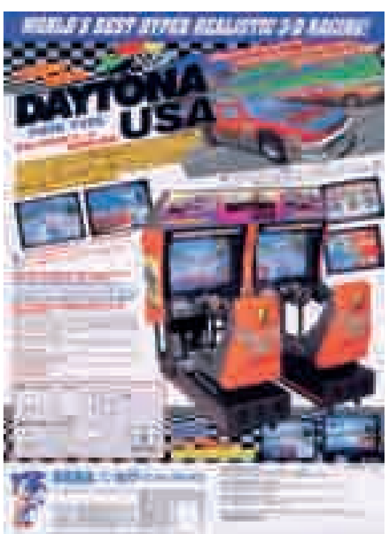
During the early Nineties, 3D games were still very much the stuff of dreams. Whilst certain coin-ops and home computers had achieved the difficult feat, their results were often uninspiring wireframe models at worst, or lifeless, flat-shaded polygons at best. They lacked character and detail as well as the power to run at a decent speed with realistic physical properties. That was until Sega's Model 2 arcade board hit the streets in 1993.

Since real-time 3D visuals were only achievable with very expensive hardware during the early Nineties, such technology was exclusively used by military research companies and was even out of reach of a massive manufacturer like Sega.

Thankfully, in 1991, the American company General Electric Aerospace was looking to use its military simulator technology for commercial purposes. GEA had previously developed simulators for NASA's lunar landings in the Sixties and was the perfect choice of partner for Sega, who was researching ways to develop its next generation of arcade hardware. In order to demo their advanced technology, GEA modeled a geometrically correct replica of the Daytona International Speedway (which was located close to their headquarters in Florida) and placed two Formula One cars on the track that could be driven in real time. The demo game ran on hardware that cost $1.5 million and was so far in advance of everything else that it soon caught the eye of Sega. The two companies immediately collaborated on the Model 1 hardware, which featured ground-breaking 3D graphics but was very expensive to produce and failed to turn a profit. Undeterred, Sega continued its relationship with GEA and began work on a successor to Model 1 that would deliver much more realistic graphics.

Sega had always imagined its 3D games to have textured surfaces rather than the flat shades of the Model 1 games like *Virtua Racing*, so textured polygons became the top priority in the development of Model 2.


» *Pilot Kids* was the last Model 2 game to be released. We hear it's a bit of a dog. Ha ha!

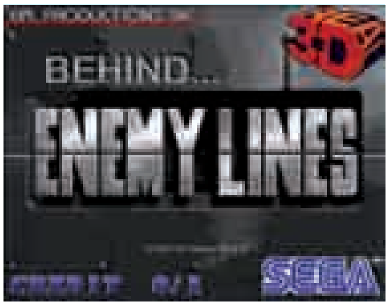


» *Daytona* was ahead of its time in 1993 and is still one of the best arcade racers 13 years on

This would allow for a previously unimaginable level of detail. Race cars would feature their own individual liveries whilst the combatants in fighting games would appear to wear clothes made from different materials and would sport facial expressions that just wouldn't have been possible on Model 1. GEA also built both Specular Reflection and Diffuse Reflection capabilities into the Model 2 hardware. For those not currently studying Physics, this means that light would reflect naturally from different surfaces. Smooth, shiny surfaces could reflect light like a mirror whilst rough textures would reflect light in many directions, which added to the realism by creating a greater contrast of light and shadow. In short, Model 2 was the first piece of videogame hardware to provide the high quality, real-time 3D visuals that we now take for granted and, as such, is probably the most important arcade board of all time. The number of classic games that were made for the system are surely a testament to this.

Model 2's debut title, *Daytona USA*, was undoubtedly inspired by GEA's original tech demo and became an unbelievable hit with arcade goers in 1993. Its realistic handling and ability to link up to eight cabinets together for epic multi-player races made it the most popular arcade game of all time. The coin-op was so profitable, in fact, that Sega and every other developer struggled to make another game that could compete with its popularity, which allegedly led to the use of the phrase "It's no *Daytona*" amongst arcade operators.

The mammoth success of *Daytona* made millions for Sega, which allowed it to pour its profits back into hardware development and create three revisions of the Model 2 board in the coming years. Each revision offered only slight technological upgrades but was host to some of the most impressive games in the board's catalogue, which with the addition



» *Behind Enemy Lines* was actually made by the people who developed the Model 2 board

of Model 2A CRX included games by third-party developers. Psikyo created a couple of scrolling shooters for the board, Jaleco developed the racing game *Over Rev* and Tecmo used the *Virtua Fighter 2* engine to create *Dead Or Alive* – a hit beat-'em-up that famously saved the developer from the threat of facing bankruptcy.

Many of these games were converted to the Sega Saturn in the late Nineties but struggled to live up to their reputation on the underpowered console. Whilst the 32-bit machine had little problem running conversions of Model 1 and STV games it simply couldn't compare to the power of the Model 2. Despite this, many of the board's titles were released in a cut-down form and proved to be massive hits for gamers who were eager to recreate the arcade experience at home. Christmas 1995 proved to be a landmark event for such gamers when Sega released Saturn versions of *Virtua Fighter 2*, *Virtua Cop* and *Sega Rally* within days of each other. None of the games were perfect replicas and it would take a further three years before a console came along that was powerful enough to host Model 2 conversions properly. Both the Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 have since received superior ports of Model 2's finest games – yet many (and most notably, *Virtua Fighter 2*) still lack truly "arcade perfect" adaptations – such is the complexity of the original hardware. Emulation is still in its infancy, as many of the Model 2 boards use an undocumented processor that hobbyist coders are still struggling to get to grips with, so the only way to properly experience the games at home is to own the original cabinets: an ambition only the ridiculously rich can hope to achieve.

The Model 2 series was a truly revolutionary technological advancement. While some may lament the changes it brought about for shaping a modern games industry that's preoccupied with graphics over gameplay, there's no denying that its actual arcade games were of a fantastic quality. Whether a racing game, a fighter or a light-gun shooter, each game brought unprecendented levels of realism to its genre and cemented Sega as the most exciting arcade manufacturer of the Nineties.

"MODEL 2 WAS FIRST TO PROVIDE THE QUALITY WE NOW TAKE FOR GRANTED AND IS PROBABLY THE MOST IMPORTANT ARCADE BOARD OF ALL TIME"



» It was ten years before *Sonic The Fighters* was converted to home consoles. Others weren't so lucky

THE REAL THING

GE Aerospace didn't just design the Model 2 hardware, they made a couple of games for it too. Just as the board was in the final stages of production, GEA were bought up by weapons manufactuer Martin Marietta who turned the Model 2 team into a separate company called Real 3D, whose purpose was to create entertainment products from their technology. Its only two projects were naturally war-themed: *Desert Tank* sat the player in a tank-shaped cabinet and charged them with the task of blowing up almost everything in sight, whilst *Behind Enemy Lines* was a two-player light-gun game. The latter actually ran at 60hz with 330,000 polygons per second, which was supposedly beyond the limits of the hardware. Real 3D were later bought by Intel, who immediately fired all the employees – many of whom reformed as N-Space, the developers of *Geist* on the GameCube.

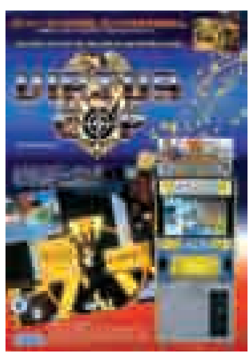




» This stage from *VF2* was missing the bridge in the Saturn version and the raft didn't move either



» See the clouds reflected in the building. That's Specular Reflection in action folks



» The Model 2 board was a master of all genres including the light-gun game

SOFTOGRAPHY

1993

Daytona USA
Genre: Racing

1994

Desert Tank
Genre: Vehicle Combat
Virtua Cop
Genre: Light Gun

1995

Manx TT Superbike
Genre: Racing
Sky Target
Genre: Flight Combat
Sega Rally Championship
Genre: Racing
Virtua Cop 2
Genre: Light Gun
Gunblade NY
Genre: Light Gun
Fighting Vipers
Genre: Fighting
Virtua Striker
Genre: Sport
Indy 500
Genre: Racing
Virtua Fighter 2
Genre: Fighting

1996

Dead Or Alive
Genre: Fighting
Virtual On: Cyber Troopers
Genre: Mech Combat
Last Bronx
Genre: Fighting
Sonic the Fighters
Genre: Fighting
Super GT 24h
Genre: Racing
Sega Ski: Super G
Genre: Sport
Sega Touring Car Championship
Genre: Racing
Wave Runner
Genre: Sport

1997

Zero Gunner
Genre: Vertical Shooter
Sega Water Ski
Genre: Sport
The House Of The Dead
Genre: Light Gun
Top Skater
Genre: Sport
Motor Raid
Genre: Racing
Dynamite Baseball 97
Genre: Sport

1998

Behind Enemy Lines
Genre: Light Gun
Dynamite Cop
Genre: Scrolling Fighter

1999

A Pilot Kids
Genre: Horizontal Shooter



THE MAKING OF...

FORBIDDEN FOREST

The Resident Evil series propelled survival-horror videogames into the public consciousness, but the genre has much older roots. As far back as 1982, Paul Norman was crafting a gory, action-packed horror epic on the humble Commodore 64. Craig Grannell discovers what horrors lie within…



» Hit the Demogorgon between the eyes and it explodes, lighting up the night sky



» The dragon is a tough enemy to kill, and its fireballs are lethal

Parallax scrolling; enemies that react to your actions; a 3D environment that progresses from day to night; a gripping, context-sensitive soundtrack that changes as events unfold; action, tension, monsters, and gore. These elements are commonplace in contemporary videogames, but were revolutionary in the early Eighties; and yet they all appear in Paul Norman's debut, *Forbidden Forest*. Well-received at the time, the game has gained a cult following in recent years, not only due to its then-innovative features, but also because of its all-engrossing gameplay and atmospheric soundtrack, which urges you on. Based in the forest of its title, *Forbidden Forest* finds a lone archer in a twisted woodland at dusk, charged with hunting down and killing the evil Demogorgon. Armed with a bow and a limited number of arrows, he must dispatch many of the Demogorgon's minions and then face their master. Failure means certain (and gory) death…

For the game's genesis, we must travel back to the summer of 1982.



» When shot in the head, the dragon bursts into flames and slowly sinks to the ground

Paul Norman was hammering away at a keyboard at a company called Synchro, oblivious to the chaos going on around him. He'd started dabbling with computers after 15 years as a guitarist for various bands. "I happened upon a VIC-20 in a music store, and as a life-long sci-fi fan, I couldn't resist," explains Paul. After mastering BASIC, he created his first game, *Psychophants*, and then an *Asteroids* clone. Soon after, Paul spotted an advert in a newspaper for videogame programmers. "I showed Synchro my games, and they asked if I had used 'machine language' – apparently, my BASIC trickery worked fairly well," laughs Paul. "I admitted I hadn't, said I was studying it, and was offered a job."

The next day, Synchro plonked a C64 in front of Paul, and suggested he get started on a 'bow and arrow' game, in 'machine language'. "I'd never seen a C64 before, but over the next month, *Forbidden Forest* and my knowledge of coding grew together," recalls Paul, who rapidly started adding movie-like elements to the game. "The guys at the company just wanted a target game with a bow and arrow," recalls Paul. "I wasn't interested in that – I'm a movie buff, not a gamer, and there's no movie in that idea." Therefore, Paul did everything to make the game akin to a movie – hence the forest, monsters, music, and lighting. Comic relief was added, too, notably for the 'dancing archer', seen between rounds (a source of arguments amongst long-time C64 fans, who disagree about exactly what the archer is doing). Paul says: "I'm happy to clear this up: he's dancing – not because he's cleared the round, but because randomly running all his postures for a moment with some music was funny!"

Some humour would likely have been welcomed by Synchro at the time, as the company was going bust. "I tend to focus at times and not notice the world is collapsing around me," says Paul, and he was focussed squarely on his game when Cosmi's George Johnson arrived to buy the furniture from Synchro. "He bought me, too," quips Paul, remembering the day his game moved to its permanent home. "He kind of had to – I was still working at one of the desks!"

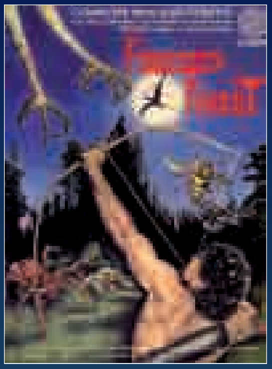
By this time, the game was about three-quarters complete. "When I showed Cosmi what I had of the game, the parallax-scrolling got a gasp, and the gore got a laugh from Johnson's partner," recalls Paul. "They knew they had something, so I was free to finish it and I could work from home, which was great, seeing as commuting was so inefficient."

Cosmi's hands-off approach worked well for Paul, who says he was working instinctively, rather than to a grand plan: "Since I'd never done anything like this before, I didn't have a 'style' or structure to compete with or depart from." This gave rise to *Forbidden Forest*'s storyline and content, as Paul explains: "Bows and arrows: I think *Robin Hood* – unless Indians are involved – hence the forest. The story? That's *Eye Of The Beholder* territory. The creature set was fairly traditional, borrowing from the Ray Harryhausen school of drama. And although the frogs were a departure, the Demogorgon was definitely derived from the last scene of *Night Of The Demon*. Inspiration also came from *Jason And The Argonauts* and *Mysterious Island*, and the death scenes were, apparently, entirely

IN THE KNOW



- » **PUBLISHER:** COSMI
- » **DEVELOPER:** PAUL NORMAN
- » **RELEASED:** 1983
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10



DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

AZTEC CHALLENGE
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1983

SUPER HUEY
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1985

NAVY SEAL
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1989



"I SHOWED SYNCHRO MY GAMES, AND THEY ASKED IF I HAD USED 'MACHINE LANGUAGE'; APPARENTLY, MY BASIC TRICKERY WORKED FAIRLY WELL!" PAUL NORMAN

THE MAKING OF… FORBIDDEN FOREST

"GIANT SPIDERS CHEW YOUR HEAD OFF. GIANT FROGS SQUASH YOU. SPEAR-WIELDING SKELETONS STAB YOU. IT'S ALL WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT IN A FORBIDDEN FOREST!"

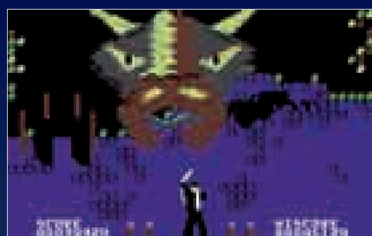
ENEMIES EXPLAINED

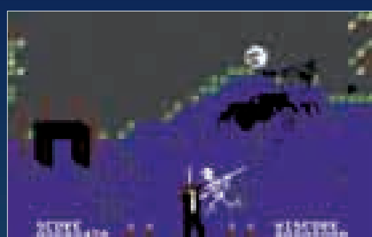
The forbidden forest is no ordinary place; our hero probably wishes he had rather more ferocious firepower. First, waves of black spiders attack, biting your head off. Next, a bee with lethal sting darts around the screen. Dispatching that foe results in countless huge frogs leaping towards you, intent on squashing our hero. Things then hot up: fireball-spitting dragons swoop in, and then a phantom and its skeleton army aim to dispatch you in a painful way (the skeletons have a penchant for stabbing people in the face with spears). The penultimate enemy is a giant snake, with venom that melts careless archers. Finally, you face the Demogorgon: night falls, and you've 60 seconds to pinpoint his position in the dark, using lightning flashes as an aid.



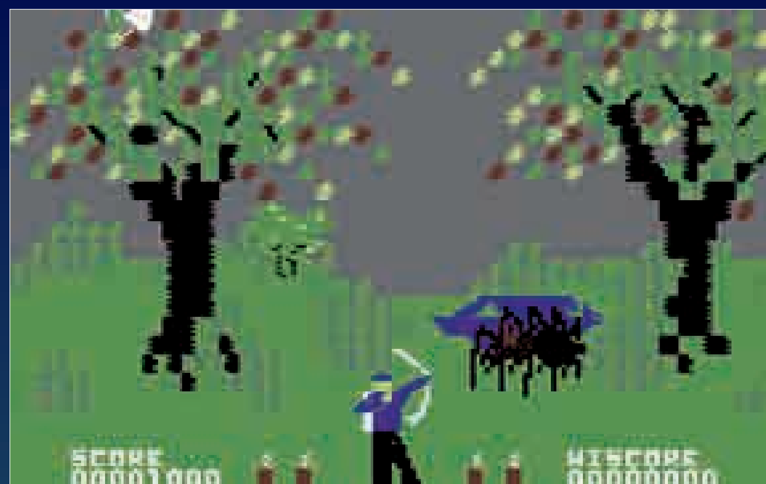
THEY SAID:

"THE GAMEPLAY IS SUPERB – FULL OF BLOOD, GUTS AND GORE. A SUPERB SOUNDTRACK BELTS ALONG AS THE ARCHER CLEAVES A PATH THROUGH THE FOREST, ADDING GREATLY TO THE ATMOSPHERE. THIS IS DEFINITELY A CLASSIC – NOT TO BE MISSED." ZZAP!64





» Skeletons can be deadly, pick them off from a distance



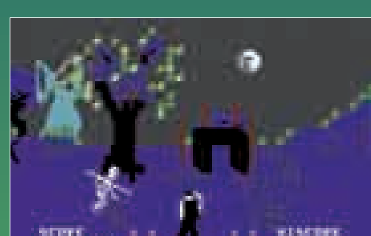
» Dispatch the spiders by letting them come in close—move towards them and they scuttle away

logical. "Giant spiders chew your head off. Giant frogs squash you. Spear-wielding skeletons stab you. Giant snakes melt you with their venom. It's all what you might expect in a *forbidden forest*," explains Paul.

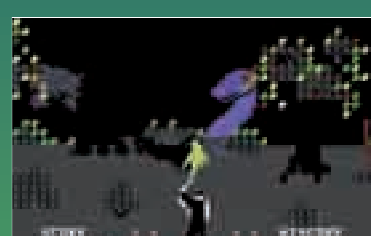
Although Paul's understanding of technology improved as the game developed, he suggests there's a certain amount of 'smoke and mirrors' when it comes to the game's revolutionary elements: "The human brain and senses are very co-operative when it comes to entertainment. I learned this when playing guitar: some things you hear sound very difficult to play, but they aren't really, just as some things that sound simple are painfully hard to achieve." Regarding *Forbidden Forest*, Paul notes that, for example, there's nothing complicated going on with the parallax scrolling: "The flat forest scrolls repeatedly over several 'pages' in a continuous loop, and some smaller, sprite-based trees move a bit slower, behind the forest. After playing with the speeds, the right differential was found to fool the eye." The illusion of time in the game is largely down to a gradual change of background colours; and Paul created frame-by-frame sprites for anything that required complex movement.

Ultimately, then, *Forbidden Forest* is a case of 'less is more' – an example of how quality results from a combination of great ideas rather than fancy effects. Paul maintains that he didn't know and couldn't have cared less what the Commodore 64 was actually capable of anyway: "I wanted what I wanted and I pounded on the thing until I got as close as I thought I could. The hardware limits are obvious to some extent – for example, the graphics are pretty chunky, but, as I said earlier, the brain does the work for the audience. Put enough simple things together, working towards the same effect, and it can look like you know what you're doing!" Paul cites the music as another example of this approach. When music is added to a movie scene, the effect raises everything to a whole new level, both emotionally and atmospherically. This is no different for a videogame, although few realised this." "But it wasn't rocket science," says Paul. "The C64's sound chip made tones, whines, and buzzes. I just used them pretty much as-is, and wrote a melody!"

These elements all combined to create a game that met with great critical acclaim; indeed, it's credited with putting Cosmi on the map, and even two years after its release, Zzap!64 included *Forbidden Forest* in its launch issue's 'top 64' (charting a respectable 21st). And three years later, Julian Rignall raved about the budget re-release, only criticising the chunky graphics. Paul suggests such praise is largely down to him never letting equipment determine the end result: "When I create music today, I have Kurzweil orchestral keyboards to play with, but the principle is no different to composing on the C64: equipment can facilitate music but can't create it – you have to make the music in your head first. And for games like *Forbidden Forest*, as soon as I made one thing work, I would automatically think 'what more can I do?' and keep that up until time and memory ran out." Attention to detail, according to Paul, is just a matter of what you're willing to settle for.



» So many ghoulies to destroy, you'll need nerves of steel to get through this particular forest…



» The snake's venom melts with a single touch, but the creature itself is easily dispatched

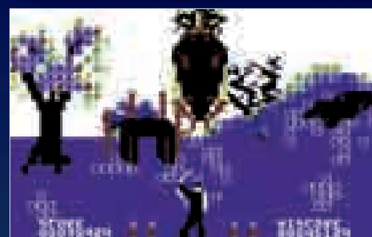


» The phantom sends endless legions of skeletons to fight you. A well-placed shot in its hood results in it dissolving, emitting an eerie, blood-curdling scream





» An endless number of massive frogs form the third challenge. Keep moving, though, because if one lands on you: squish!



» The Demogorgon is rarely seen so clearly: only during flashes of lightning can you pinpoint its position

TAKING CONTROL

With most early Eighties games arming the hero with a gun, *Forbidden Forest*'s bow-and-arrow approach was radically different, as was the control method Paul developed. "The joystick is primarily made for moving a character with the stick and shooting with the button," says Paul. "This is fine for a gun, and many would think 'what the hell – so it's an arrow' if a bow's used instead. My life would have been easier if I thought that way, too, but I wanted to get into how a bow and arrow feels when used, and how to simulate that using a joystick."

Paul's says his solution arrived because of "too much ambition for my skill set and not enough experience to know better". The fire button became the 'loader', which doesn't work while moving, and the stick moved the character, or the bow if the button was held down. You shoot by letting go of the button. "This is like letting go of the bow-string," explains Paul. "As friends of mine point out, I often take an obvious solution and turn it on its head – in *Forbidden Forest*'s case, this resulted in you firing by taking your thumb 'off' the fire button."

> "FOR GAMES LIKE FORBIDDEN FOREST, AS SOON AS I MADE ONE THING WORK, I WOULD JUST AUTOMATICALLY THINK 'WHAT MORE CAN I DO?' AND KEEP THAT UP UNTIL TIME AND MEMORY RAN OUT."
> PAUL NORMAN

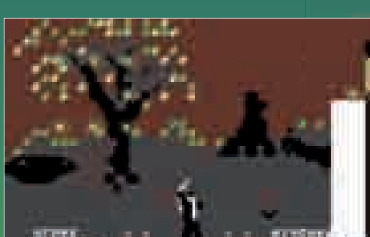
As the sole creator of the game, Paul's glad of its acclaim and modern-day appeal, but he could never fully know what others got out of it. "My guess would be that *Forbidden Forest* tries for more than just accomplishment – like making a shot and getting from point to point. That is an important element for a videogame, but if you can also embed some emotional stimuli, all the better."

So, with the benefit of hindsight is there anything he'd have done differently? "I'd have marketed it myself, or been pickier about who I worked for," says Paul, adding that he 'sucks' as a businessman and that while Cosmi made a ton of money out of his games, Paul didn't. But regarding the game itself? "No. It was done when it was done, and it had to be that way, otherwise it would never have been finished."

Despite a little bitterness when it comes to the business side of things, Paul maintains that he very much enjoyed creating games for the C64. "My goal was always to make something I'd enjoy playing," says Paul. "This required using randomness and trickery that would make it impossible to find a 'system' for winning. This turned out well in *Forbidden Forest*, better in *Aztec Challenge*, and really well in my last Cosmi game, *Navy Seal*, which I doubt too many people got to play."

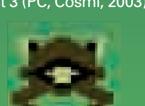
These days, bar a brief flirtation with Flash, creating the *Aztec Challenge*-style *Azteca Queen* (www.aztecaqueen.com), Paul's output has few connections with his past. "I keep moving on to other things," he explains. "At the moment, I'm working on an online system with Midwest Talent Management to found a non-profit resource for actors and other talent called 'My Talent Secretary'. This will offer a web presence and information archive for the thousands of talented people trying to fight their way through the forbidden forest of showbiz!"

But what of *Forbidden Forest*: the game – will it ever appear again? "I don't know," says Paul. "But I hope someday that a giant frog leaps out the sky and squashes George Johnson. That would be amusing."



OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Beyond the Forbidden Forest (C64, Cosmi, 1985)
Forbidden Forest 3 (PC, Cosmi, 2003)



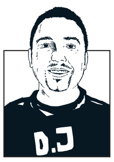


WILD GUNS

WHEN COWBOYS AND ROBOTS COLLIDE



- » **PUBLISHER:** TITUS
- » **RELEASED:** 1996
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £20+



HISTORY

The Japanese love big stompy robots, it's a fact. They just can't get enough of them so it's unsurprising to see so many successful franchises that are still going strong in Japan (and that occasionally get released overseas). So when we first played *Wild Guns*, a *Cabal*-style shooter set in the Wild West and met our first metallic opponent we didn't even bat an eyelid. We simply looked our metal foe straight in the eye and filled him full of lead. Ah, happy days.

But then, anyone who's ever played a Natsume game prior to the 1996 released of *Wild Guns* – for some reason, it took two years to hit the UK – will know that they should expect the unexpected. *S.C.A.T.: Special Cybernetic Attack Team* saw you defending New York from fish-like aliens; *Spanky's Quest* put you in charge of a bubble-blowing monkey, while one of the main protagonists of *Pocky And Rocky* was a racoon. Needless to say a game featuring cowboys, old-fashioned weaponry and state of the art robots seemed like the next logical step.

Despite it's bizarre fusion of themes, there's plenty to enjoy in Natsume's excellent little blaster – think *Blood Brothers* (the sequel to *Cabal*) but with far more pyrotechnics. Main characters Clint and Annie – wonder where Natsume got those names from? – are fairly nimble and can scamper about the screen to avoid bullets, and the relentless assault they face never stops for a second. While you can fill your many opponents with lead, it's also possible to pepper the game's many environments as well. Bottles smash, crates blow up, wagons fall apart, it's a great little touch, and by the time you've completed most levels there's usually nothing left of them but empty broken shells. Indeed, one of the best stages takes place in a good old fashioned bar and has you breaking about bottles and villains with gay abandonment, and let's face it, who can resist a good old fashioned bar fight?




RESTAU
TIME
50
0

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



DATAFILE

NAME: HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

DATE OF BIRTH: 30.7.57

FIRST JOB: SHORT ORDER COOK

CURRENTLY: EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, SCOTT WEST PRODUCTIONS

FAVOURITE FILM: DR STRANGELOVE

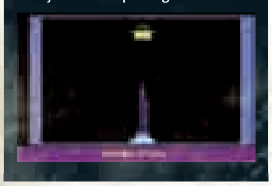
HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

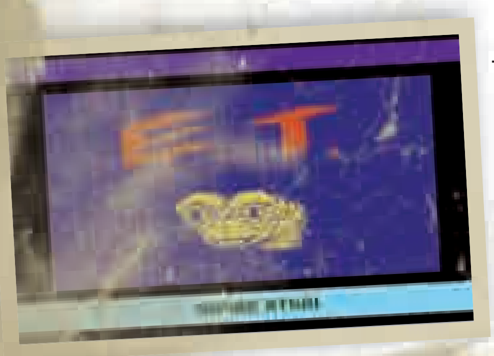
HE PRODUCED A TRIO OF MILLION SELLING GAMES IN THE EARLY DAYS OF ATARI AND THEN CARELESSLY BROUGHT THE WHOLE VIDEOGAMES INDUSTRY CRASHING DOWN. HE WENT ON TO BE AN AUTHOR, FILMMAKER, PHOTOGRAPHER, TEACHER AND ROBOT-BUILDER. CAN HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW SIMPLY NOT SETTLE?

YOU MUST PLAY...

Raiders Of The Lost Ark

Howard's neglected middle child and something of a lost gem. *Raiders* continually surprises – hidden areas, multiple routes through the game and an ingenious use of both joysticks to manipulate movement and inventory simultaneously. It's full of lovely little touches: Indy's death throes, which leave only his hat remaining; parachuting into trees to investigate that intriguing hole you've plummeted past so often; Yar making an unexpected cameo. A prime example of Howard thinking big and just about pulling it off.





"Actually, my motivation comes from your country," explains Howard, who even greets me with a particularly well-researched 'ey up mi duck'. "I've always tried to follow Monty Python's advice – Now for something completely different…"

It was a creed he applied consistently in his approach to game design. "I need a reason each time I do a game – something that makes me feel like it's really worth doing. With *Yars' Revenge*, I wanted my first game to make a big splash on the screen and break new ground in the gaming world. With *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, one of the first movie licences, I was trying to make the biggest adventure game there'd ever been on the VCS. With *ET*… well, *ET* was about getting a f*cking game done in five weeks!"

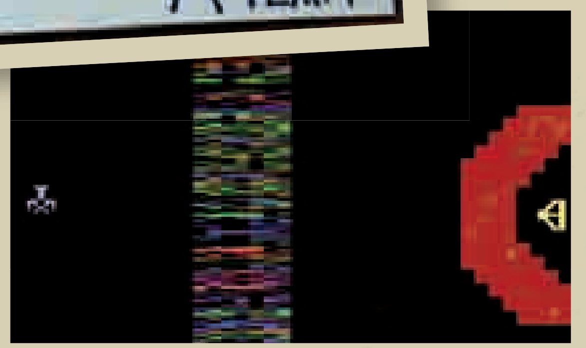
Ah yes, *ET*. 'The Worst Game Ever Made' ™. A game so malignant, millions of unsold cartridges had to be buried in the desert beneath concrete, yet it still caused the collapse of the industry from beyond the grave. A game everyone has heard of, few have played and the only videogame to truly qualify for 'urban legend' status.

"It's a compelling myth," Howard chuckles. "No one's ever retrieved a piece of *ET* from the desert and it would have required a conspiracy of Kennedy Assassination proportions to have kept it a secret for so long. The game still sold a million and people still talk about it 25 years later. And to think I single-handedly toppled a billion dollar industry just cracks me up…"

It was an industry the young Howard didn't particularly seem destined for. He'd consciously avoided computers during his schooldays in New Jersey and it wasn't

» "With *ET*… well, *ET* was about getting a f*cking game done in five weeks!"









» **Left and below:** A Retro Gamer exclusive – Jerome Domurat's never previously published concept art for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*

» **Above:** Howard was initially considered too straight for Atari. Okaaaay… **Right:** Howard's first release came with a comic he penned to explain the elaborate back-story

until his Economics degree that he rather reluctantly took a computer class. He became smitten overnight, voraciously consuming the entire semester's work in days. Hungry for more, he took a job at Hewlett Packard after leaving college, only to discover the grim reality of cube life. Rather than going quietly insane with boredom, Howard decided to do it loudly and with gusto. His outlandish behaviour caught the attention of one co-worker who knew of a place where eccentricity was the norm…

"I went to Atari for an interview and immediately I knew it was the place for me – relaxed, creative, fun and the technical side was really interesting. But they turned me down for being too straight! Maybe it was my formal educational background and my time at HP. Or perhaps it was the herring-bone tweed jacket with leather elbow patches… but hey, I was wearing sandals!"

Much pleading and a 25 per cent pay cut later, Howard persuaded Atari to give him a chance. He also convinced them that the project he had been assigned – a conversion of the arcade game *Star Castle* – would 'stink' but he could take the game elements and come up with something good. The resulting *Yars' Revenge* boldly announced Howard's arrival on the screen.

"I wanted to fill the senses," he enthuses, clearly proud of the game that cemented its place in history as the biggest-selling original title for the VCS. "I wanted players immersed and to really feel when something happens in the game. So there's a death sequence, a victory animation, a full screen explosion, lots of colour and glitter."

The game deftly combined innovation with immediacy, and had some clever technical touches (the eye-catching Ion Zone was created using the raw game code itself to randomise the graphics and colour registers and you'll also find the initials HSW hidden away as an Easter Egg) and proved especially appealing to female players. "I think it may have something to do with the oral component," muses Howard, with hopefully only his tongue in his cheek. "Like *Pac-Man*, you nibble and you run away. The more you eat, the closer you get to danger…"

"I THINK YARS' REVENGE APPEALED TO WOMEN BECAUSE OF THE ORAL COMPONENT. YOU NIBBLE AND YOU RUN AWAY…" HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

For his next project, the theatrical Howard took the concept of method-acting to its logical conclusion – method programming. He donned Indiana Jones' trademark hat and would roam the corridors of Atari HQ cracking a ten-foot bullwhip at terrified marketing suits. "I said the whip was for R&D – Research and Discipline. I would try anything to increase my immersion in the character and help make the game better."

Raiders Of The Lost Ark became his greatest production. Howard crammed in 13 distinct locations into the limited memory of the 2600 and populated them with slithering snakes, black market sheiks and a wealth of fiendish puzzles. Amongst the array of assailants facing the intrepid adventurer is a 'raving lunatic' – was this perhaps an indication of Howard's mental state at attempting such a grand endeavour on the humble VCS?

"No anthropomorphism there," he assures us. "Though that was kind of how I felt four weeks in to *ET*…"

Successfully converting a Spielberg blockbuster into game form was indeed a double-edged sword. When Atari management decreed *ET* must be released in time for Christmas 1982, cutting the typical development period of six months down to a miniscule five weeks, Howard's standing with Spielberg and his love of a challenge meant he stepped up to the plate. It was a colossal effort, which involved virtually continuous coding and a mountain of marijuana, but Howard delivered. Sort of.

"I submitted a complete, non-trivial game on time, so in that sense it was a success. Many didn't enjoy playing it; so on that level it was a failure. It sold well over a million – a success! It needed to sell seven million to make money – a failure! Ah, it's all relative…"

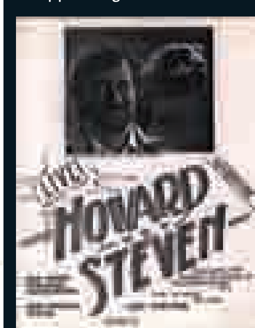
What *ET* did demonstrate was Howard's increasing mastery of the hardware. He returned to the frenetic action of *Yars'* and through ingenious vertical separation, managed to display a multitude of character sprites simultaneously on-screen. *Saboteur* was an original, multi-directional shooter and was 95 per cent complete, when Atari acquired the *A-Team* licence and approached Howard with a plan.

"I thought what the hell – let's put a giant Mr T head in there! I began reworking the graphics and some of the gameplay, but then Atari imploded, the Tramiel's came in and that was the end of game development."

Howard did meet with crazy fool Jack Tramiel to discuss game ideas. However, when the new boss seemed more concerned that Howard's wife had a job

MY DIRECTOR IS AN ALIEN

Howard travelled to Los Angeles to meet Steven Spielberg while programming *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and decided to break the ice with a typical conversation starter. "I told him I had a theory that he was an alien. I figured that contact with aliens was imminent and they were smart enough not to just show up at the door. They needed to 'prepare' the earth, so they send an advance team. You see, with *Close Encounters* and *ET*, it was really the first time aliens had been presented positively – friendly figures, not monsters. Spielberg was part of that team! He was the creative guy and the alien marketing arm made sure everyone on the planet saw his films. Then we'd be ready to receive aliens in a positive way. They were already here amongst us…"
And did Spielberg nod? "Well he smiled, but didn't invite me to the mothership. Which was disappointing."



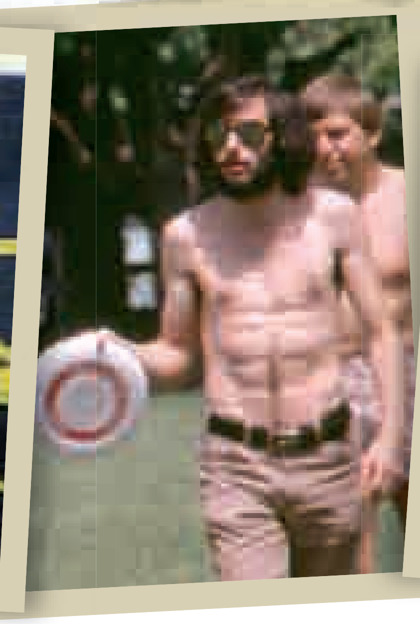
» The flyer knocked up by piss-taking colleagues to commemorate a true meeting of minds…

DESERT ISLAND DISKS

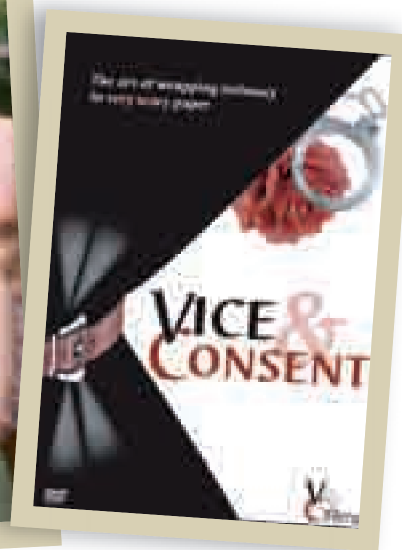
WHAT CHERISHED GAMES WOULD YOU TAKE TO THE ISLAND?



» Howard ordering in more caviar to compliment the bubbly in Atari's heyday



» After attaching Semtex to the Frisbee, Howard headed for the marketing department…

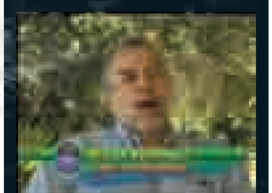


» Howard's latest work on the BDSM community. You will never listen to the Barney Song in the same way again. Trust me

ONCE UPON ATARI

Howard's entertaining and revealing documentary on the Atari story features interviews with such alumni as Todd Frye (*Ms. Pac-Man*), Rob Fulop (*Missile Command, Night Driver*) and graphic artist Jerome Domurat, who collaborated with Howard on *Raiders, ET* and *Saboteur*. It's a fascinating mixture of crazy anecdotes and exasperated accounts of how the marketing department installed after the Warner takeover at best misunderstood the whole process of game development and at worst, openly despised the programmers. The resulting rift was a major factor in the company's spectacular collapse. Would things have been different if Atari founder Nolan Bushnell had stayed at the helm?

"That's an excellent point and yeah I think it could have been different," agrees Howard. "The people that came in after Nolan were 'org chart' people, who saw programmers as the line workers at the bottom of the chain. No one was lower than that. Unless they got lucky one night. But Nolan was a developer and knew what it meant. Even as CEO, he'd come round and talk to programmers about their game and any technical issues. You'd never see the people that replaced him, but Nolan would come and lay out fat lines of coke for people…"



» Atari founder Nolan Bushnell in the *Once Upon Atari* documentary. Rolled 20-dollar note just out of shot

"WHEN I WAS DOING RAIDERS, I'D CARRY A TEN FOOT BULLWHIP AROUND. I SAID IT WAS FOR R&D – RESEARCH AND DISCIPLINE." HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW

rather than waiting at home with his slippers ready, he knew it was time to move on. It wasn't quite the end for *Saboteur* though, which finally appeared on the Atari Flashback Plug and Play joystick released last year.

For the next decade and a half, Howard turned his creative talents to everything from videography to industrial robotics, but was finally lured back to the games industry and joined 3DO at the end of Nineties.

"What a reality crash! Games used to be about finding something innovative and fresh and now it had become a risk minimisation exercise. Trip Hawkins, the CEO, had assembled possibly the greatest collection of talent in game history – wonderfully creative people like Rob Zdybel, Bill Budge, folks from Atari coin-op, Magnavox and Mattel – and then imposed ludicrous deadlines and provided no budget. To hear him stand up and say, 'With another two weeks, are you really going to make a better game? Will it offset the two weeks of sales we've missed out on?' It just felt like everything I'd loved about the industry had been killed."

The bitter experience was compounded when 3DO closed its doors abruptly, leaving Howard and many others unemployed and owed thousands in unpaid wages. His disillusionment with the state of the industry gave an added poignancy to his first major work as a documentary maker, as he set about telling the tale of when things were both very different and ominously familiar…

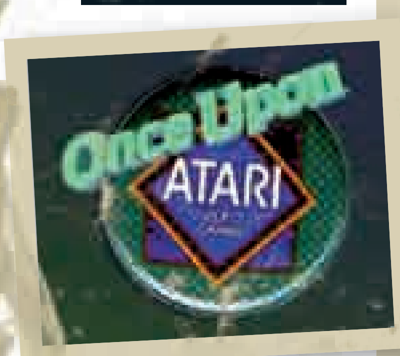
"Atari was really the biggest thing in my life and it affected me in myriad ways. I wanted to make a film that told it from the perspective of those that had actually been working there. Lots of bullshit had been written, trying to sensationalise, but the truth is always more interesting. I needed to make the film, to make my peace with my own experience there.'

Once Upon Atari, produced in four parts and now available on a single DVD from www.onceuponatari.com, paints a vivid picture of the company during its creative blossoming and subsequent chaotic demise. Told through frank and often-hilarious interviews with all the key players (see boxout), it demonstrates Howard's determination to get to the truth by giving a voice to those previously maligned and misunderstood.

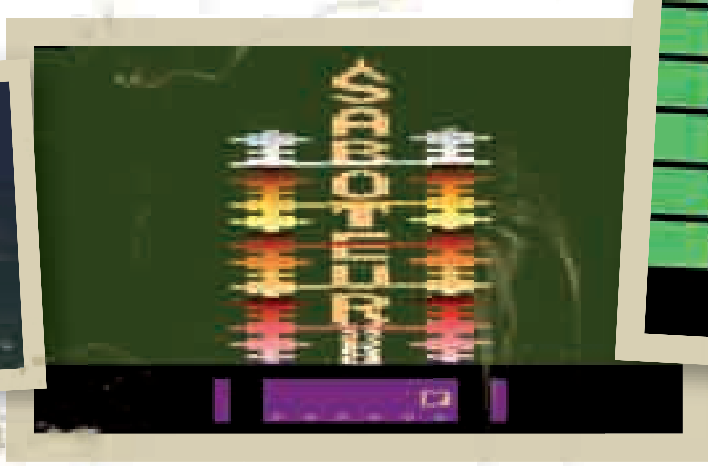
A similar motivation runs through his most recent production, as *Vice And Consent* (www.viceandconsent.com) seeks to present the BDSM community (the acronym stands for Bondage and discipline, Domination and submission, Sadism and Masochism, but you knew that…) in an honest, non-judgemental light. Is there perhaps a parallel between these two apparently disparate subcultures?

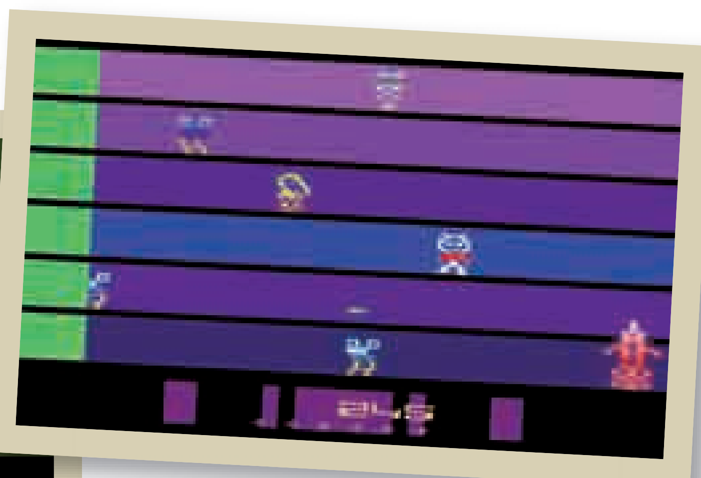
"You could argue videogames are safe fantasies, like the BDSM world. And if you want to talk about a group of people willing to put themselves through extreme pain, torture and hardship, that sounds like game development to me…"

The agony and ecstasy of hacking out code on the 2600 may not quite be a thing of the past for Howard either, as he casually mentions he still has the design for *Yars' 2* up his sleeve. Whether he ever spoils us with a long-awaited sequel or continues to charm us with his wit and erudition in any number of creative fields, I for one will be watching expectantly. He had me at "ey up.'



» **Above:** Relive the sights, sounds and, yes, smells of life at Atari…





» *Saboteur*, before Mr T entered the picture and refused to get on no plane



HOWARD SCOTT WARSHAW DESERT ISLAND DISKS



QIX ARCADE

1 A great game that really demonstrated out-of-the-box thinking. An interesting application of geometry and space management. Most games were shoot and avoid, but this was about carving out a space. There was a safe time and a dangerous time. It had a really different approach and illustrated that you don't have to think traditionally about what makes a game.



JAK AND DAXTER PS2

2 Beautiful, fun and compelling. On a sensual level, it's a spectacular achievement and really pushed the capabilities of the machine. And I never got tired of the music either. Doing that with a repetitive theme that you're going to listen to for 30 or 40 hours is really quite something.



MILLIPEDE ARCADE

3 Lots of visceral action, lots of things happening everywhere and so well tuned. You can go for the quick win if you shoot the DDT and wipe out a whole millipede or if it gets all broken up and down at your level, you have that frenetic recovery element of cleaning up your mess and getting out of a tight spot. Both really gratifying.



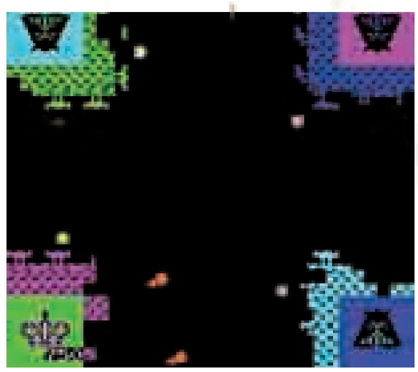
DEFENDER ARCADE

4 The first perfect videogame. *Asteroids* and *Space Invaders* were huge, but were uni-dimensional. This was the first multi-dimensional game. There were more threats and objectives than just cleaning up your plate. There were styles of play. It was the first game to really generate meta-conversations – people would talk about their strategies, and that was significant to me.



GRAND THEFT AUTO 3 PS2

5 One of the most significant videogames. It was the first to use 3D space and create a whole world, rather than make 2D concepts in 3D. A triumph of game design and a bridge point between traditional gaming and a virtual reality experience. You were inside the game – you could learn its logic. *Defender* gave you multiple approaches but *GTA3* did it on crack.



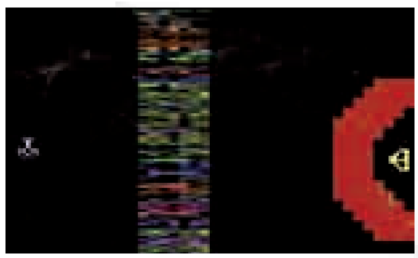
WARLORDS ARCADE

6 The first really great multi-player game – a party game that engaged people who were playing and watching. Fun, simple and so well executed. Carla Meninsky did the VCS conversion and she's a wonderful woman. Clever, witty and bright, but she totally walked away from the industry after Atari. She was so cool – she did *Star Raiders*!



ROBOTRON ARCADE

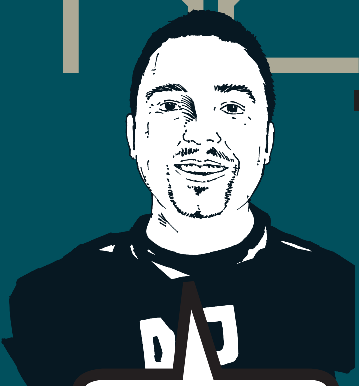
7 Eugene Jarvis is probably the best game designer ever and this is just outstanding. There are very few games that can generate this intensity and involvement. Now you have my triathlon. Everyday at Atari, I had to get over 100K on *Millipede*, *Defender* and *Robotron* before I started work and this was always the toughest – I suffered from *Robotron*-elbow regularly.



YARS' REVENGE ATARI VCS

8 I'm not ashamed to choose this. I need it with me. It embodies so much of what my objectives were and what I enjoy in life. Wonderful things came to me because of *Yars'* and I could create no bliss without it.

RETRORATED



Yes, it's a spanky, brand new state-of-the-art games machine, but the PSP has plenty of titles available on it for those of the retro persuasion. From classic RPGs to dazzling remakes, Sony's portable caters for everyone.

STREET FIGHTER ALPHA 3 MAX

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

They say football is a game of two halves, and it's also the case with Capcom's latest brawler. On the upside *Street Fighter Alpha 3* boasts amazingly crisp visuals, an outstanding array of characters (37 in fact) and an insane amount of different game modes. It's easily one of the most comprehensive versions of the game we've ever played and would be a must have buy if it wasn't for one little thing – namely the PSP's dodgy D-pad. While Capcom has simplified the controls, the poor little PSP just isn't up to the task of pulling off super combos and other intricate moves. If only the amazing D-Pad peripheral that had been given away in limited quantities with the Japanese release had been included.

OVERALL 74%



» If only it played as good as it looks…

WORMS: OPEN WARFARE

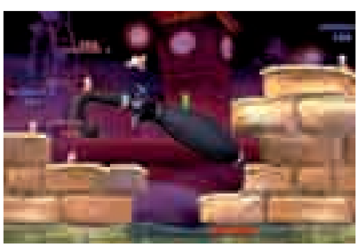
INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** THQ
- » **DEVELOPER:** TEAM 17
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

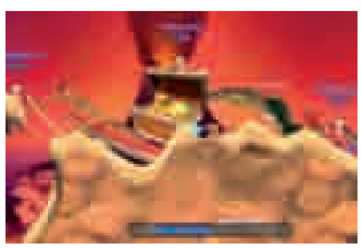
It's not easy capturing lightning in a bottle. Team 17 may have done the business with its excellent re-imagination of *Lemmings,* but even the briefest of plays on *Worms: Open Warfare* reveals it to be cut from an entirely different (though still enjoyable) template.

There's plenty to enjoy. The visuals are beautiful, with a host of wonderfully animated worms and some fairly strong physics on display, and the sound is likewise full of character. The problem comes with the actual gameplay. It's not quite as intuitive as we would have liked, and as a result you can often put yourself in situations that become tricky to get out of. It's a strong effort and miles ahead of the inferior DS effort, but not in the same league as the superior *Lemmings*.

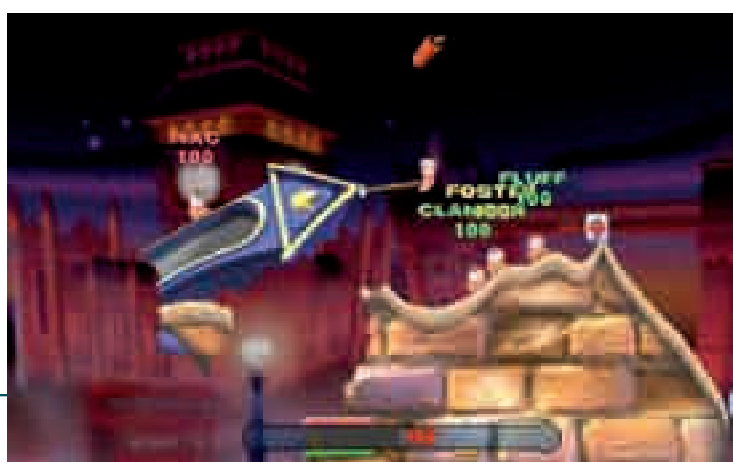
OVERALL 77%



» *Worms: Open Warfare* is full of character and is onoe of the best party games currently available



» Considering how disappointing the DS version was it's great to see that the PSP game has turned out so well



VIRTUA TENNIS WORLD TOUR

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **DEVELOPER:** SUMO DIGITAL
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

Now this is more like it. *Virtua Tennis: World Tour* is effectively a tweaked update of the fantastic *Virtua Tennis 2,* arguably one of the greatest tennis titles of all time. Sumo Digital's conversion is very special and is a near perfect replica of the original arcade and Dreamcast titles. The character models are spot on and beautifully animated, the gameplay is fast and furious, loading times are barely noticeable and it even plays well with the analogue nub. The only downside we could find is that the difficulty in the World Tour mode is a little inconsistent, other than that though *World Tour* is one of the finest sports games currently available for the PSP.

OVERALL 91%



» Another stunning conversion from the guys and girls at Sumo Digital. If Sega doesn't give it *Afterburner: Climax* we may have to start crying



BREATH OF FIRE III

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £29.99

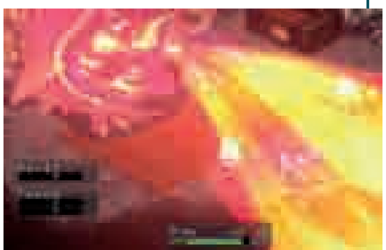
Considering the sheer amount of RPGs on Sony's home consoles, it's surprising to see so few available for the PSP. Capcom's *Breath Of Fire III* is a fairly decent offering, but quickly loses focus due to its dull plot, uninspiring gameplay mechanics and incessantly long loading times.

While the ability to take on different dragon forms (and, subsequently, new skills) is a nice touch, there's just not enough excitement on offer, and you'll soon find yourself on autopilot as you stumble from one dull encounter to the next. A lack of decent RPGs will mean that some gamers will pick up *Breath Of Fire*, but Namco's *Tales Of Eternia* is a far superior effort.

OVERALL **61%**



» If it wasn't for the sleek machine you were playing it on, you'd almost think you were back in the Nineties



» *Breath of Fire III* isn't a complete waste of your time, but Tales of Eternia does everything so much better

TALES OF ETERNIA

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** UBISOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** NAMCO
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

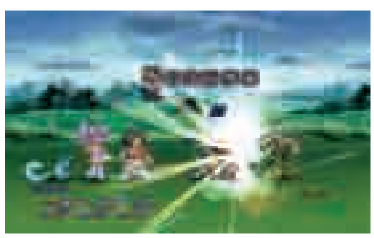
Whilst *Tales Of Eternia*'s plot is clichéd to the extreme and contains typically annoying voice acting, it's saved by a superb real-time combat system.

Although it doesn't feature the ability to attack on multiple planes it's still a comprehensive system and is a world away from the staid combat of Capcom's *Breath Of Fire III*. *Eternia*'s structure is also a lot more enjoyable, and loading times are unobtrusive. Throw in some beautifully rendered visuals, a rich soundtrack and the ability to save on the go and *Tales Of Eternia* quickly cements its position as the best RPG that's currently available for Sony's handheld.

OVERALL **88%**



» No Japanese RPG is complete without a selection of cute characters and *Tales of Eternia* is no exception



» Alright, so the story is a bit naff but at least Namco has managed to deliver in the combat stakes

MEGAMAN: POWERED UP

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

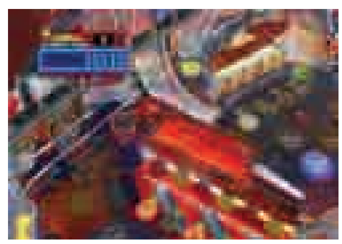
Megaman: Powered Up is a good example on how to revive a classic franchise for a new generation of gamers. As well as including the original hard as nails NES game, Powered Up's main draw is the funky new remake that features enhanced level design, a level editor, cute polygon-modelled characters and the ability to play as the game's bosses. Be warned though, whilst Powered Up features lots of cool ideas it's severely hamstrung by its ridiculous difficulty level, that takes away some of its fun. The very definition of tough love.

OVERALL **71%**



» Oilman may look cute but he's a real pain in the arse to defeat. Study his attack patterns carefully…

GOTTLIEB PINBALL CLASSICS



» A wonderful diversion that proves that there's more to the PSP than the latest flashy IP licence

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SYSTEM 3 SOFTWARE
» **DEVELOPER:** FARSIGHT STUDIOS
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £29.99

Unlike other PSP compilations that have featured classic arcade games, this new UMD from System 3 Software is packed with some of the greatest pinball machines from Gottlieb's back catalogue. While only a few tables are initially open, you can unlock the others by completing tasks that range from lighting up one side of a table to scoring a set amount of points. Then there's the faultless presentation, slick physics and the ability to play each table from multiple different viewpoints (including the nifty ability to turn the PSP through 90 degrees). A highly enjoyable title that deserves to be experienced.

OVERALL **89%**



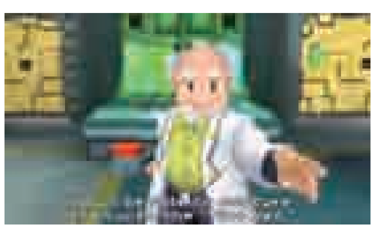
APE ESCAPE P

INFORMATION

» **PUBLISHER:** SONY
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £34.99

The original Ape Escape was a huge deal on the original PlayStation, because it was one of the first games to make full use of its analogue sticks. Sadly, the PSP only comes with one nub, and as a result, the intuitive system in the original game suffers greatly. There's still plenty to enjoy here, and catching monkeys is as fun as it ever was; but considering the superiority of Sony's handheld, we were expecting ported titles to be a lot better. Sure the visuals are great, and the gameplay is mostly intact, but Ape Escape P is ruined by its clumsy interface and frustratingly long loading times. Try before you buy.

OVERALL **65%**



» A fun game that's spoilt by unweildy controls

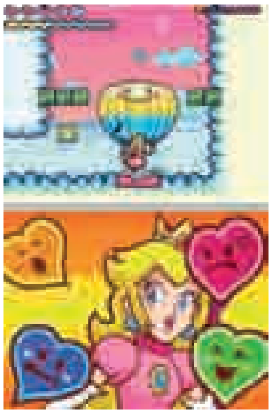


» An ape riding a shark? Now we've seen it all…

» CUTE AS A BAG OF KITTENS

SUPER PRINCESS PEACH

A PEACH OF A GAME



- » **SYSTEM:** DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** 26 MAY
- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1



There's still a few months before Mario makes his (hopefully) triumphant return in *New Super Mario Bros*, so Nintendo has kindly given us another cute platformer to fill the void.

Super Princess Peach may be appearing on a brand new console, but her on-screens exploits (see what we did there) wouldn't look out of place on Nintendo's original handheld. In a reversal of fortunes it's everyone's favourite plumber who's gone and been captured by Bowser, so the pampered princess has got off her cute arse, brushed down her favourite pink dress and with the help of a magical talking parasol (no really) has set off in hot pursuit.

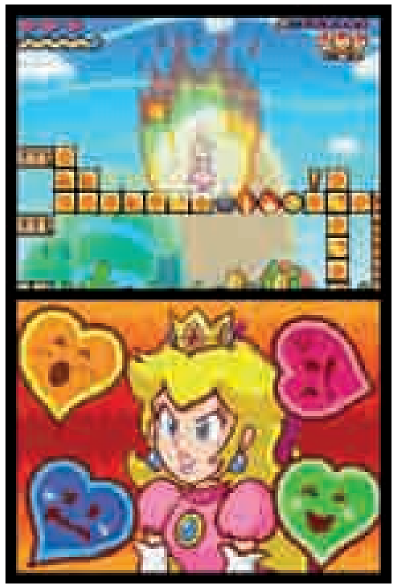
What follows is the sort of platform adventure that we were all experiencing a good two decades ago. Crumbling and floating platforms, blocks containing coins and end-of-level bosses are all present and correct and give *Super Princess Peach* a deliciously old school feel that's sure to go down well with fans of the genre. While Peach is unable to bottom bounce around the levels, she does have her magical parasol, which as the game progresses, reveals itself to have a whole host of useful abilities, from simply destroying and picking up enemies to doubling up as a cute boat. And then you have the much-celebrated emotion abilities…

Being the expressional lass that she is, Peach has four different emotions that can be used via the touchscreen (providing her emotion bar is full). Interestingly these abilities not only grant her new skills, but can also be used to destroy monsters and solve puzzles; – crying for example allows Peach to water plants, which then grow and allow her to reach new parts of a level.

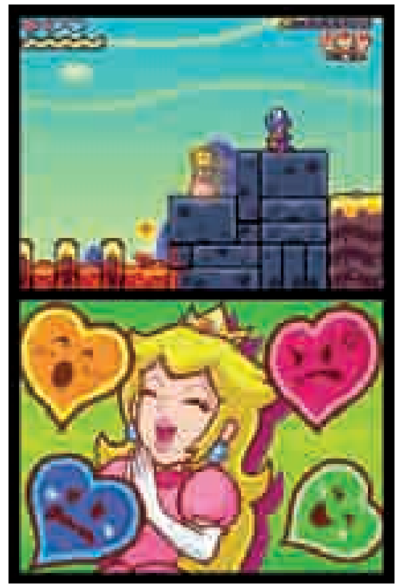
While the emotions are a nice touch, they're not really offering anything that we've never seen before and that's the biggest problem; this is platforming by the numbers (albeit very enjoyable platforming). Add in the fact that it's easier than falling off a log and you have a cute little title that's over far too quickly. Shame.



» Destroying enemies with just your tears? Who said it was weak to give in to your emotions?



» Don't make this girl angry, she's liable to get a little hot under the collar…



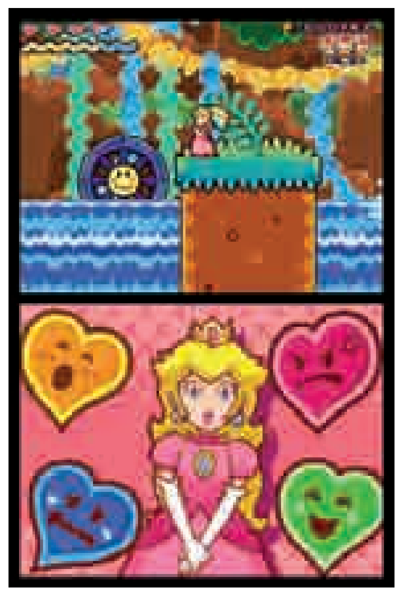
» The 'chill' emotion enables you to regain energy. Very handy



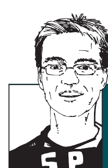
OPINION

This is far too twee for my liking. It's a nice touch to see Mario's many enemies in the game and the levels look great, but there's just not enough here for me. There's nothing worse than DS games that could have easily appeared on the GBA and *Super Princess Peach* is a perfect example. There's no denying that it manages to hit all the right buttons (ho ho) but my money's on *New Super Mario Bros*.

Damian Butt



» Super Princess Peach is a competant little platformer that harks back to the good old days. If only there was a little more to it…



OPINION

Don't listen to the others - I love *Super Princess Peach*. It looks great, plays like a dream and actually gets quite tricky towards the end of the game. Solid platformers aren't exactly abundant on the DS, so when one does come along that features some neat ideas, lots of *Mario* references (and most importantly for me) is fun to play, then I'm going to be all over it. The perfect thing to play while we wait for *New Super Mario Bros*.

Simon Phillips

IN SUMMARY

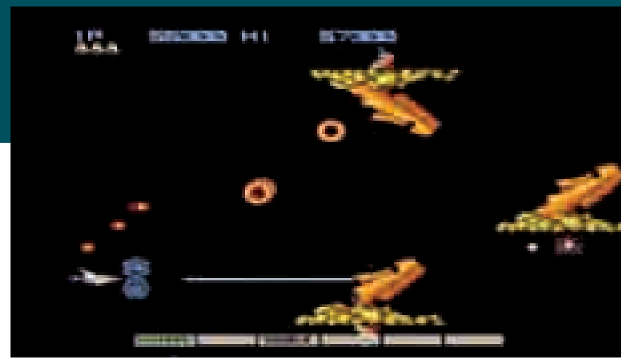
An enjoyable, if fairly unexciting platformer that's solidly put together, but doesn't exactly bring any exciting additions to the genre. It's also rather simple to complete – better keep that receipt…

RATING **70%**

eMag

» KONAMI'S TOUGHEST FRANCHISE JUST GOT A LITTLE HARDER

GRADIUS PORTABLE



» You can't get more 'classic' than this. So many precious memories on one tiny UMD…

DESTROY THEM ALL



- **SYSTEM:** PSP
- **PRICE:** 6,317 YEN (ABOUT £30)
- **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
- **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE
- **PLAYERS:** 1-2
- **FEATURED GAMES:** GRADIUS, GRADIUS II, GRADIUS III, GRADIUS IV: FUKKATSU, GRADIUS GAIDEN



After last month's exhaustingly comprehensive *Gradius* feature you may find it surprising to see so many games missing from Konami's first *Gradius* PSP compilation.

The reason for this is that Konami has simply decided to concentrate on the arcade side of the franchise's heritage (although its kindly included the rather excellent PlayStation exclusive *Gradius Gaiden* to nicely round things off for us).

The first thing that strikes you about *Gradius Portable* is how nicely presented everything is. As well as being able to choose from all five included games, there's a rather nice gallery that features an amazing array of *Gradius* tunes from the five games and plenty of videos from other titles in the *Gradius* series.

Each game also has a rather extensive amount of options that range from simple things like setting the difficulty and lives, to customising the controls and the size of your ship's hitbox. It's also possible to alter the ratio of the display screen by altering between 'Arcade' and 'Wide' modes.

Finally, if you don't like borders you can simple zoom in so that the game fills the PSP's screen. While this makes it easier to spot enemies and bullets, the downside is a drop in quality with everything looking rather blocky. The conversions themselves are absolutely faultless, and when kept in their correct ratios, look fantastic on the PSP's crystal-clear screen. In fact our only niggle is that the two-player option from *Gradius Gaiden* is no longer available (it was obviously too much effort for Konami to include a Wi-Fi option for just one game).

Of course, it's the games that make or break any compilation, and while the lack of games is somewhat disappointing, their quality is instantly apparent. *Gradius* and the beautiful *Gradius Gaiden* are the obvious highlights, but both *Gradius II and Gradius IV* are sufficiently different to receive continued plays. Only *Gradius III* fails to offer any long-term enjoyment, mainly because it's so sodding difficult (after three hours of solid play, we gave up on ever reaching the third level).

Sure there's worrying few games available (especially when compared to the far superior *Capcom Classics Remixed*) but it's the quality, not quantity that matters here.



» Before *Gradius V* came along *Gaiden* was the most gorgeous *Gradius* title



OPINION

There's a positive deluge of compilations available for the PSP at the moment, and while *Gradius Portable* only features five games, four of them are fantastic examples of the shoot-'em-up genre and well worthy of your time. While the original *Gradius* is a firm favourite, it's the sublime *Gradius Gaiden* that stands out for me. If only Konami hadn't dropped the fantastic multi-player option I'd be in heaven.

Damian Butt

IN SUMMARY

Not including any *Parodius* or *Salamander* titles is a bit of a disappointment but *Gradius Portable* is still a fairly impressive, if rather bare UMD. Let's just hope Konami releases a Castlevania compilation next, we'll be first in line to buy it.

RATING **83%**

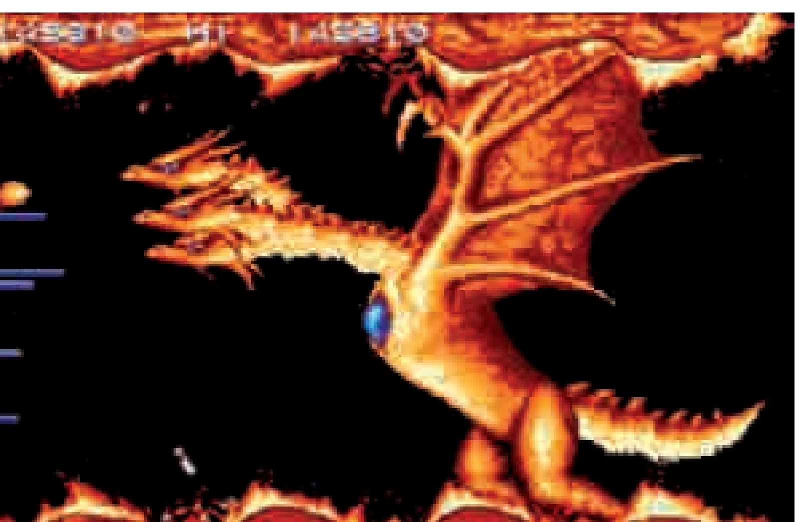


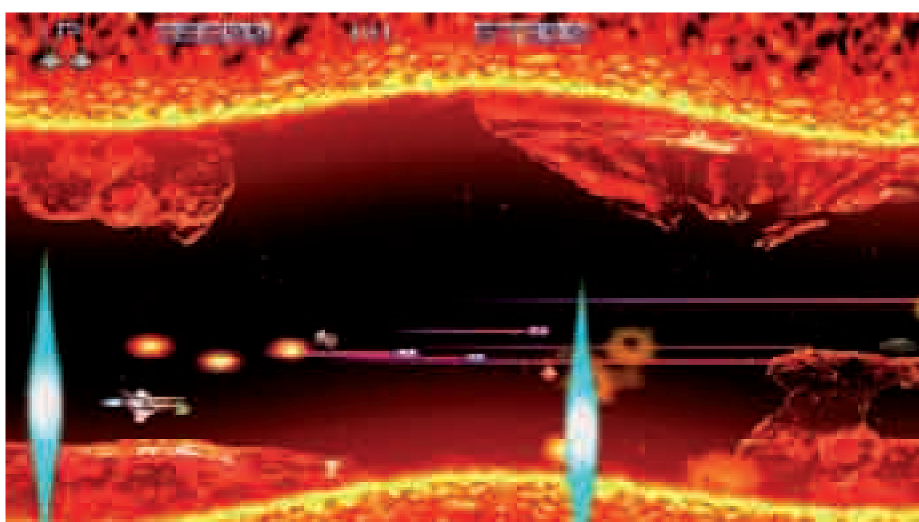
OPINION

Not my favourite series by a long chalk (I much prefer the *R-Type* games) but there's no denying that Konami has produced a beautiful, if incomplete collection of shooters. Plenty of options, spot-on conversions (for the most part) and a great soundtrack gallery means that fans of the series are going to be on cloud nine. Let's just hope that we see similar compilations in the future.

Simon Phillips

» If you've gotten this far into the game you're either a god or a cheat





RETRORATED

» AND WE THOUGHT MAKING MAGAZINES WAS TOUGH...

IBARA

BEAUTIFUL, BUT OH SO DEADLY



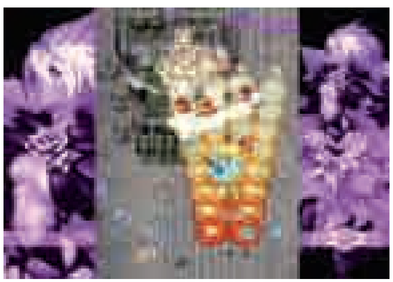
- » **SYSTEM:** PS2
- » **PRICE:** 7,423 YEN (£35)
- » **RELEASED:** OUT NOW
- » **PUBLISHER:** TAITO
- » **DEVELOPER:** CAVE
- » **PLAYERS:** 1-2



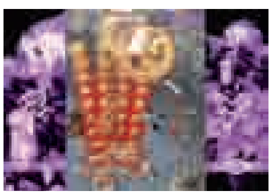
If you're new to the shoot-'em-up genre then you may want to give *Ibara* a wide berth. It's not that it's a poor game (far from it) it's just that it's one of the most punishing shooters we've played for sometime and it'll give newcomers plenty of grief.

Of course, die hard fans of the genre will welcome the constant onslaught of bullets, debris and enemies and will be instantly transported back to the hey day of *Battle Garrega* (seen by many as one of Raizing's finest blasters). Cave consists of many ex-Raizing staff, and while *Ibara* isn't part of the *Garegga* franchise, *Garegga*'s influence here is obvious.

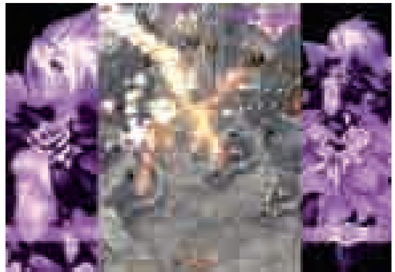




» Collecting roses is the key to chaining your multiplier and earning huge points



» No shooter is complete without vast, over-the-top explosions



» Even veterans are going to struggle with the sheer amount of flak Ibara throws out



» And the end of each stage you'll face off against a Rose sister. Be careful, these cats have claws



OPINION

Christ, I've seen some bullet-spewers in my time but *Ibara* takes the biscuit. It's one of the most inaccessible shooters that I've ever had the misfortune to play, and I wouldn't be surprised if even veterans find the going tough. There's far too much to take in for my liking and the grainy low-res visuals are really disappointing. Not my cup of tea at all I'm afraid.

Simon Phillips

Ibara features the same gritty look that made *Battle Garegga* so distinctive and while the graphics have lost some of their sharpness in the translation to the PS2, what's on offer is still very impressive and the dark, oppressive look is perfectly mirrored by an intense soundtrack. In fact, our only other problem with the game's visuals is that it's perhaps a little too busy at times. When the screen begins to fill with bullets, explosions and debris, it becomes extremely hard to work out what you're trying to do – a problem that isn't helped by the fact that the game becomes far too tough in Yoko (horizontal) mode. While TATE mode makes the game much easier, its drawback is that you're unlikely to have a TV that you can safely turn through 90°. Oh well… It's a shame that *Ibara* feels so cramped in Yoko mode as Cave's new shooter really does have a lot to offer. The scoring system is a joy to use, controls are extremely precise (although a stick is far preferable to a pad) and the boss encounters, Ibara faces you off against five rose sisters, are superb. Sadly, *Ibara* suffers from painfully slow loading times that really kill that fast pace of the game, and while it includes an arranged mode it's not a patch on the main game. Oh, and did we mention that it's stupidly tough?

IN SUMMARY

Whilst *Ibara* is an enjoyable shooter, it's let down by a cramped playing area, needlessly long loading times and a severe difficulty level. Hardcore fans will lap it up, but anyone else may fail to see its charms.

RATING **74%**



OPINION

Thank goodness that the likes of Cave are still churning out great shooters like *Ibara*. Yes it's an unforgiving shooter, but it also offers some sweet level design, plenty of memorable (and sexy) boss encounters and has a clever scoring system. I actually prefer the arranged mode as it plays more like an old Raizing game, but then, I just like to be different…

Damian Butt



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: LINK'S AWAK

MINIATURE LINK, GIANT ADVENTURE



- **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- **RELEASED:** 1998
- **GENRE:** RPG
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** GAME BOY COLOR
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10+

HISTORY

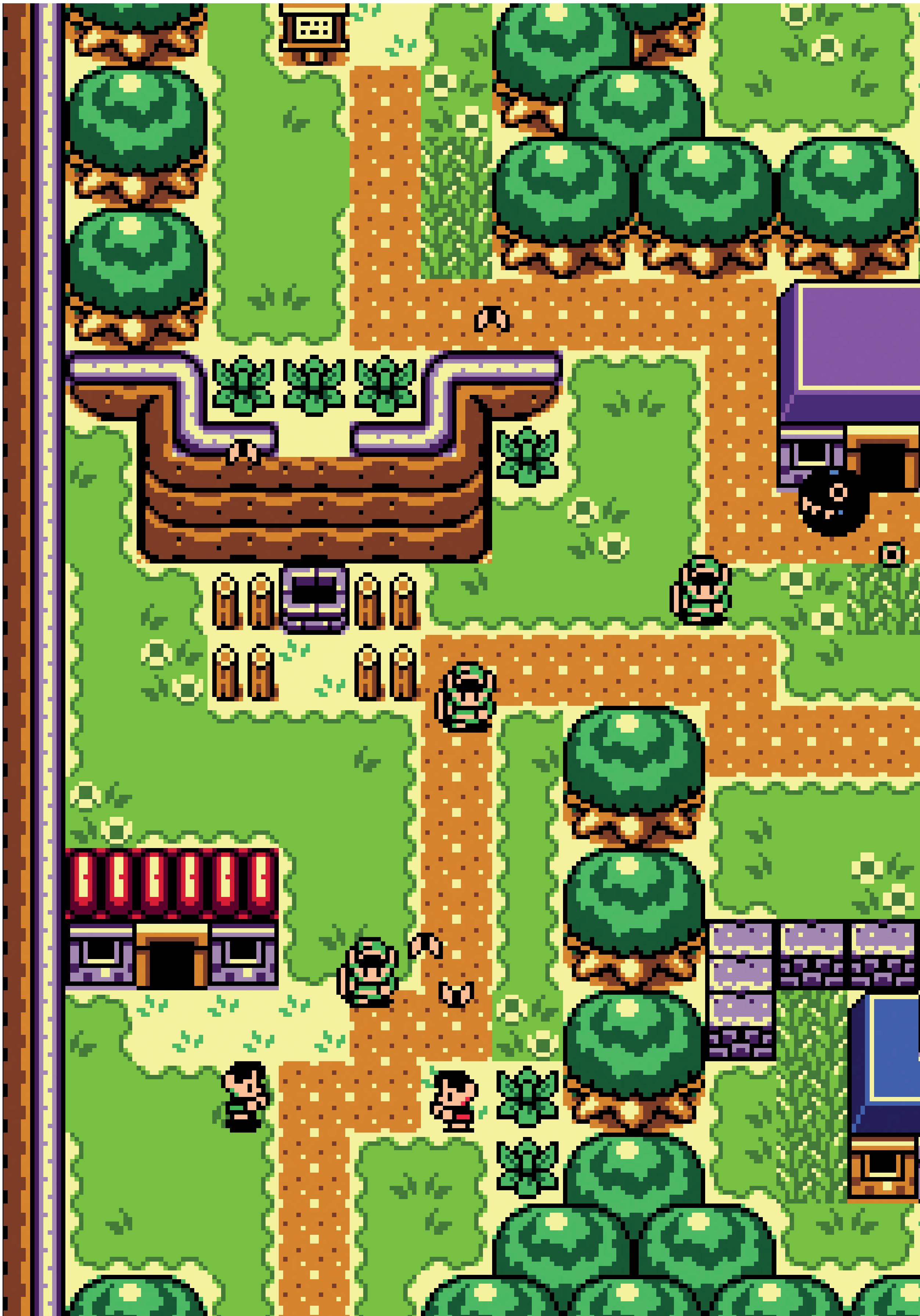


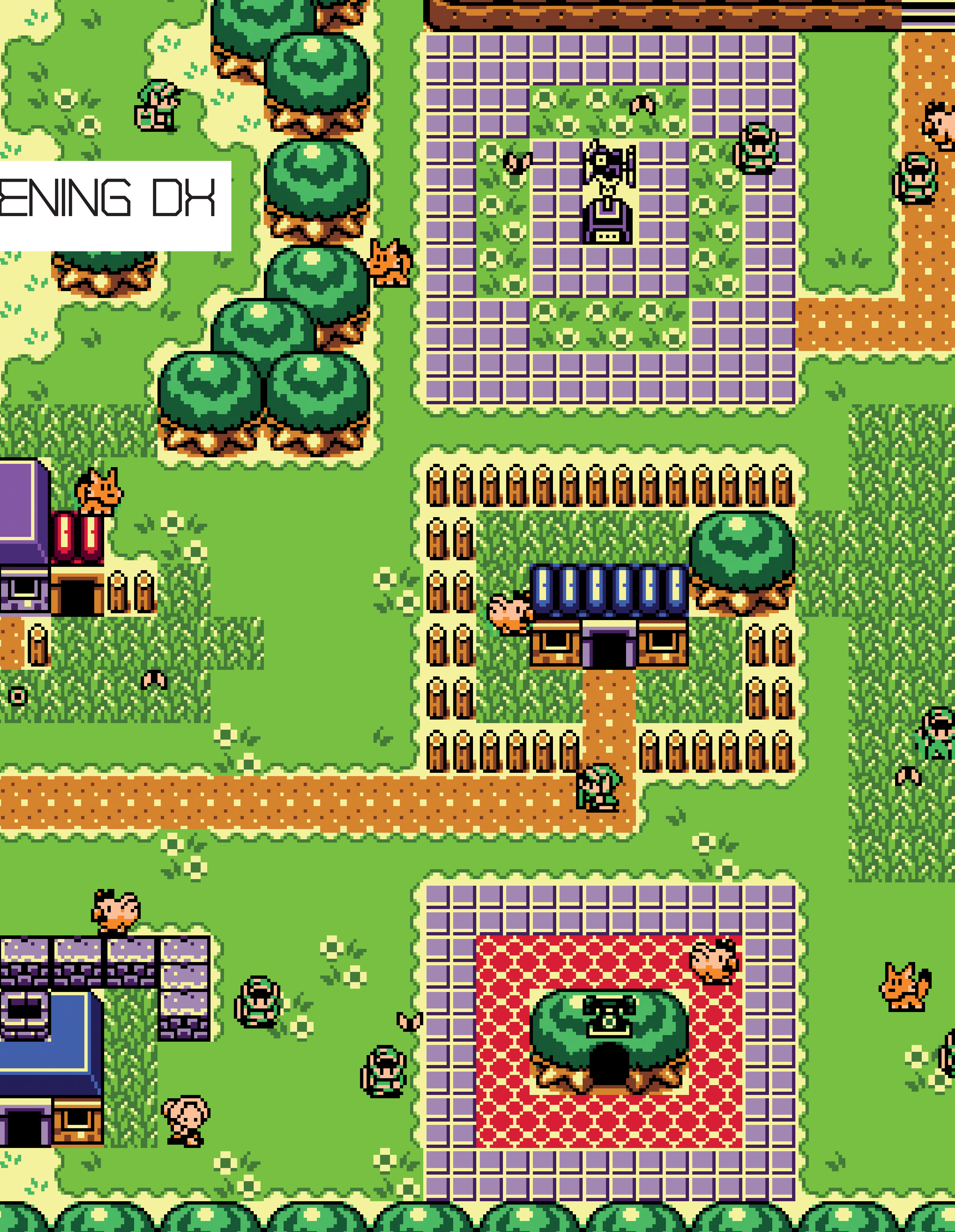
Ever since we featured *Link's Awakening* in last month's Perfect Ten I've been unable to put the damn game down. Not surprising really as after reacquainting myself with this classic title it's easy to see what all the fuss was about.

It may have been superseded by the excellent Capcom titles, but *Link's Awakening* remains a startling title and is filled with plenty of magical moments. It's actually said by some gamers (in very hushed tones of course) that Link's quest for the mysterious Wind Fish is actually superior to *A Link To The Past*. While I don't share these sentiments, it's easy to see why so many people have fallen in love with Link's first portable adventure.

For starters it looks fantastic, with Link and the rest of Koholint Island's inhabitants being exceptionally well drawn and full of life. Granted, it's little more than a coloured-in port of the original Game Boy version, but that just proves that Nintendo got everything right the first time around. Still, it's not the extra colour that makes Koholint's folk stand out; it's the characterisation that Nintendo has breathed in to them. From old man Ulrira who's too shy to speak in person, to the delightful Marin who tends to Link at the beginning of the game, each individual is so full of life that the Game Boy's small screen can scarcely contain them.

Polished graphics and enjoyable characters tell only half the story though, as it's the dungeons and finely honed gameplay that remains the lynchpin that holds this glorious adventure together. From the moment you enter Tail Cave to the final climatic battle inside the Wind Fish's egg, *Link's Awakening* remains crafted to perfection and never once puts a foot wrong. Nintendo even included a new dungeon – look for it at the graveyard – ensuring that at least owners of the original game had another reason to buy this great RPG. If you're like me and impatiently awaiting the return of Link in *The Twilight Princess*, give *Link's Awakening* a try, it makes the pain a little more bearable…




ENING DX

BARGAIN HUNT

HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is Retro Gamer's buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japan auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over 100 different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it!

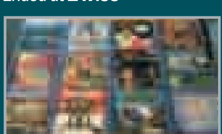
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. If something has sold for a staggeringly high amount of money (or lower than it normally would) you'll find them listed here.

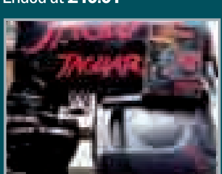
THE LAST BLADE
Sega Dreamcast
Normally sells for **£20+**
Ended at **£13.71**



12 DREAMCAST GAMES
Normally sells for **£50+**
Ended at **£17.55**



JAGUAR WITH TEMPEST
Normally sells for **£30+**
Ended at **£10.01**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45 - £60**



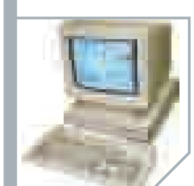
PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £35**

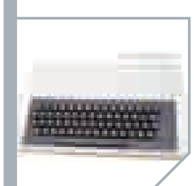
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

ACORN



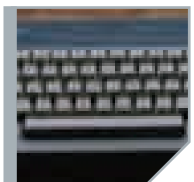
ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (with games)**

Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.
- VIRUS (STRIPPED DOWN VERSION OF ZARCH)



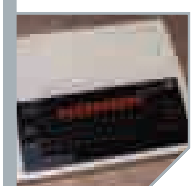
ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**

Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).



BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

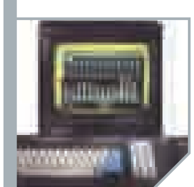
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £25**

Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £25**

Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+**

Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- RENEGADE
- RICK DANGEROUS
- GRYZOR



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50-£70**

Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE



APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ (with games)**

Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built machine and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+**

Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £30**

Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

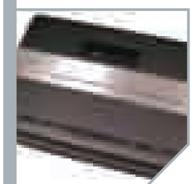
★★★★★ ROCKING HORSE SHIT
★★★★ HEN'S TEETH
★★★ LUCKY FIND
★★ EBAY REGULAR
★ CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£30**

Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.

- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£20 - £40**

Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.

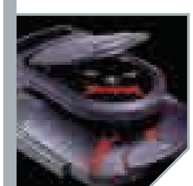
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20**

Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!

- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£70**

Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!

- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD



LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15**

Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.

- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP

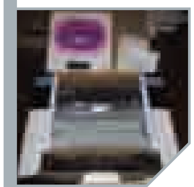


ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20 depending on model**

Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models of various specifications.

- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£75 (prices fluctuate wildly)**

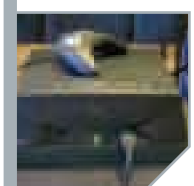
Ultra rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **£90 and upwards according to eBay**

Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.

- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



PIPPIN(ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY ★★★★★
» PRICE **Approx £500+**

A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. It's high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.

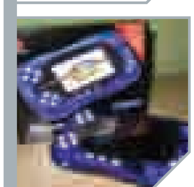
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£10**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£25**

Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.

- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★
» PRICE **£20 (more with games, depending on model)**

Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore, that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models, with differing specs, the Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.

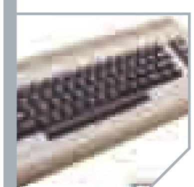
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£15 - £30**

The less well known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.

- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY ★
» PRICE **£10 - £30**

One of the best selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.

- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **Approx £30**

Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.

- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND



C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY ★★★
» PRICE **£30 - £50**

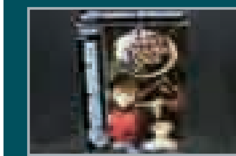
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



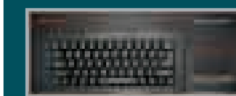
CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY ★★★★
» PRICE **£20**

Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

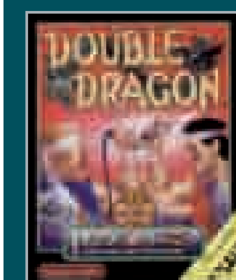
PANZER DRAGOON SAGA
Normally sells for **£100+**
Ended at **£60**



SINCLAIR SPECTRUM +3
Normally sells for **£40**
Ended at **£17.50**



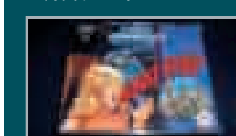
DOUBLE DRAGON
Atari Lynx
Normally sells for **£8+**
Ended at **£19.57**



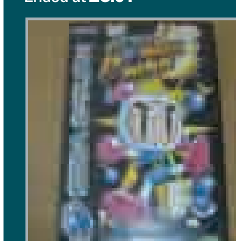
N64 EXPANSION PACK
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£3.51**



NIGHT TRAP
Sega Mega CD
Normally sells for **£10+**
Ended at **£27.01**



SATURN BOMBERMAN
Normally sells for **£20 +**
Ended at **£8.01**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**

CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30 depending on condition/extras**

The computer that established Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU



FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+**

Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu, which could read CDs.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+**

A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive, (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**

Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
–The Simpsons Pasta Shapes 400g
– Coca Cola 500ml
– Tesco Value Bread



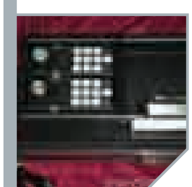
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**

More inanity from the land of the rising sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 (from the USA)**

The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 standalone**

Coleco's third generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
-CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 (very cheap on eBay)**

Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Failed console by Emmerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT ATTACK



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**

Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, which was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 upwards depending on extras**

Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 depending on condition/model**

Another attempt by Sony to enter the videogame hardware market (after the MSX), this time they took over the market. There are countless undocumented yet excellent PS games. Was later re-released as the PSOne, which is more expensive, but looks much nicer in design.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPE
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 (allegedly for a mint complete system)**

Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupe was a unique 8-bit British home computer which didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.
- ALIEN
- HONEY BEE
- POLICE BUST



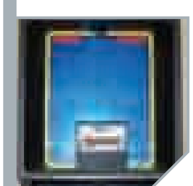
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**

Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**

Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**

The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 upwards**

Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

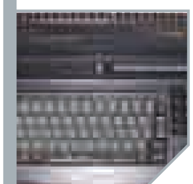
MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 - £30**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 - £50**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent homebrew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER

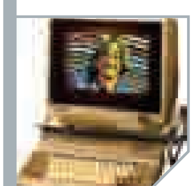


MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £50**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 - £90**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

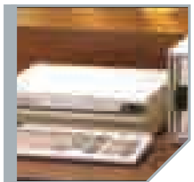
NEC



PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10-£50 depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of very cool Japanese games for it. Released in the USA as the NEC Trek. While fairly cheap, be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



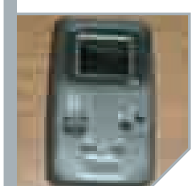
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (cheap on Yahoo! Japan)**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



PC-ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 depending on extras**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (can be found quite cheap)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two system's Hu-Cards are not mutually compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 (massive fluctuations)**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- BLOODY WOLF
- NINJA SPIRIT



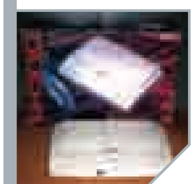
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 (prices can fluctuate)**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC-Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had 6 games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 upwards**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
Stripped down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a 6 button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

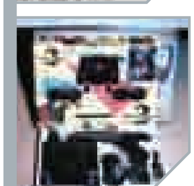
NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over a 1000 games to choose from!



FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



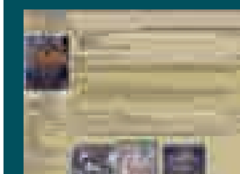
FAMICLONE
» YEAR **N/A**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Mass-produced pirate versions of the Famicom system. Virtually infinite different designs.
- CRISIS FORCE
- SWEET HOME
- HAUNG DI



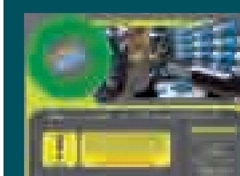
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

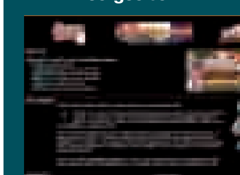
THE ARCADE FLYERS ARCHIVE
Fans of classic art from yesteryear should find the excellent Arcade Flyers Archive a great nostalgic blast. Literally thousands of different flyers and manuals are available, and the artwork on many is absolutely breathtaking. Worth a look.
www.arcadeflyers.net



RADIO SEGA
Being able to spend the entire day listening to classic Sega tunes while working on Retro Gamer fills us with the sort of glow that you couldn't get from devouring a huge bowl of Ready Brek. Simply essential listening.
http://radio.mysega.co.uk/

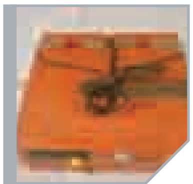


NEO-GEO.COM
If you're a SNK nut then Neo-Geo.com is the perfect place to hang out. There are lots of reviews, a bustling forum, handy price guides and everything else you need to get into the expensive and wonderful world of Neo Geo.
www.neo-geo.com



VIDEOGAME AUCTIONS
If you're fed up with eBay, why not use Videogame Auctions as an alternative? Whilst it doesn't have as many games to choose from, you'll often find rarities that usually end on a decent price.
www.videogameauctions.co.uk





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp. Comes in two colours, black and pink.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1 - £200**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite it's age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8**
A smaller and more compact GB, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12**
Colour-based version of the classic GB. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Nintendo's last cartridge based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SIN & PUNISHMENT
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards!**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of their cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72 pin based NES games work.
- VICE: PROJECT DOOM
- SNAKE'S REVENGE
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of their most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JPN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £100**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



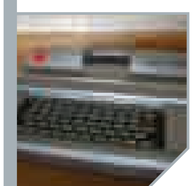
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with Digital Video Card)**
Unique system by Philips.The 200 series consists of front loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/490/740
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 (more with DVC)**
Consolised version of previous models, requires a different '9956' DVC.
- THE APPRENTICE
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**
A successor to the G7000, that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



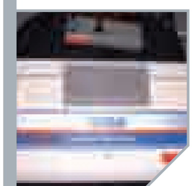
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 (must have RF + Mains)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance it's capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



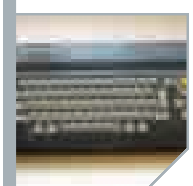
DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- IKARUGA
- CRAZY TAXI
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. Could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



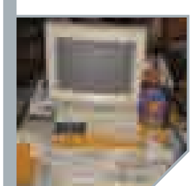
SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 with leads etc.**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- NINJA GAIDEN



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10.50 (according to eBay)**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.



TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
»» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100**
Another Mega Drive computer

hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection. Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» » PRICE **£10 depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

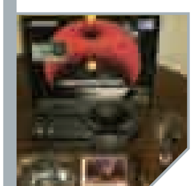


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ depending on system**
CDX/Xeye
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 (more with games)**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook style boxes.

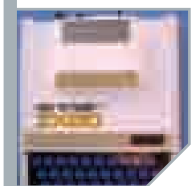
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR. AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse, that despite an amazing catalogue of games never really took off.

- SATURN BOMBERMAN
- GUARDIAN HEROES
- DRAGON FORCE

SINCLAIR



ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 Apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
-SABOTAGE



ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10**



ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**



ZX SPECTRUM
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**



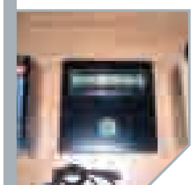
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, it was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK

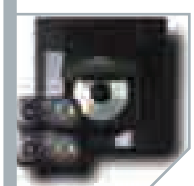


NEOGEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150 and upwards**
High powered home system by SNK. Features many high quality arcade games. Sadly, due to the high price of the original games, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEOGEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 (multi-slot systems cost more)**
High powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of NeoGeo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted).

- METAL SLUG
- KING OF FIGHTERS ##
- WAKU WAKU 7

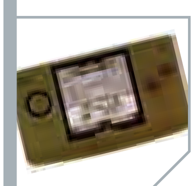


NEOGEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 varies**



NEOGEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 varies**
CD-based NeoGeo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of NeoGeo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has slightly improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHOWDOWN RPG



NEOGEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20**

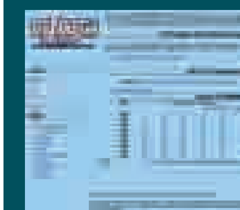


NEOGEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35**
Handheld NeoGeo systems by SNK, that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

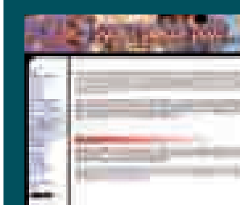
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

CRASH: THE ONLINE EDITION
Crash was one of the UK's most beloved gaming magazines and was considered an essential read if you owned a Spectrum. While it's now possible to get hold of every mag in PDF form, we much prefer browsing Crash Online whenever we need a blast of nostalgia.
http://www.crashonline.org.uk/



DOUBLE DRAGON DOJO
If you're a fan of Technos' classic side-scrolling fighter then this is the place for you. Every version of the game is analysed along with the rest of the *Double Dragon* universe. This is mind boggling stuff.
http://doubledragon.classicgaming.gamespy.com/



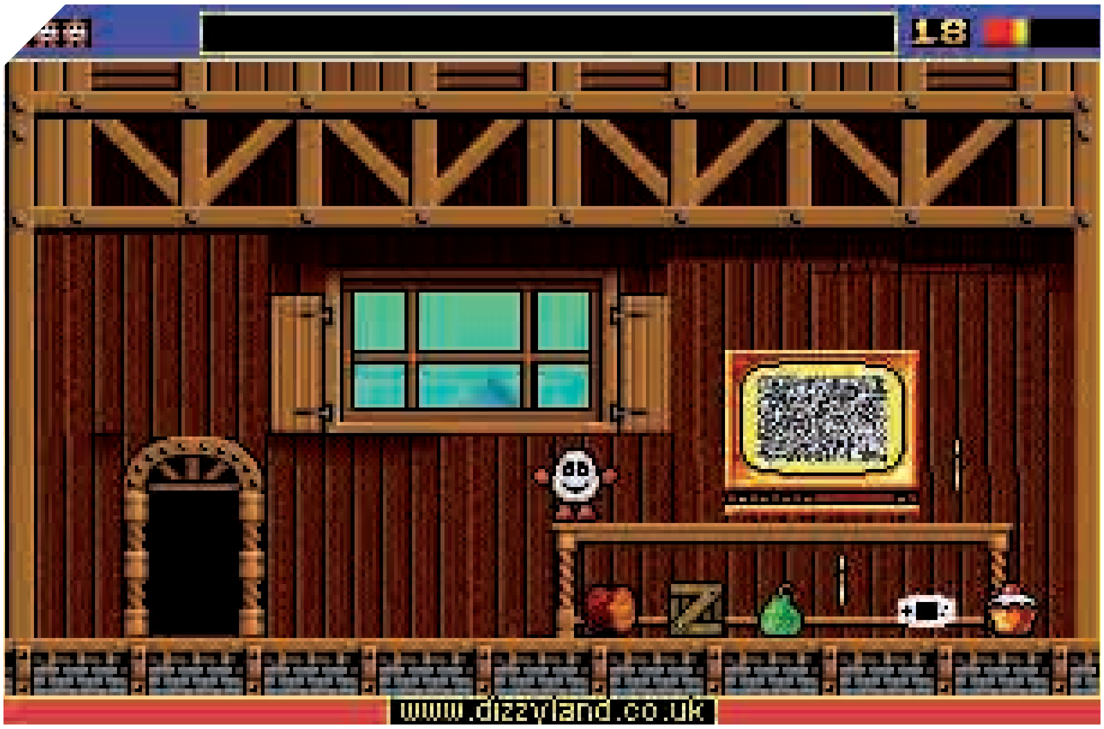
ARCADE HISTORY DATABASE
We've been scouring this great site for months now, and we're still nowhere near uncovering all it has to offer. There's a staggering amount of information on display, along with plenty of fantastic screenshots. Arcade heaven.
www.arcade-history.com



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming.org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

RETRO SCENE

AS RETRO REMAKES NEW COMPETITION HEATS UP WE DECIDED TO SPEAK TO SITE OWNER ROBERT FEARON AND FIND OUT A LITTLE MORE ABOUT IT



» *Dizzy In Wonderland* is a great little remake that perfectly captures the spirit of the original games

ENTER RETRO REMAKES' NEW COMPETITION AND WIN A FANTASTIC SELECTION OF GREAT PRIZES

ANY OLD REMAKES?



» OneSwitch.org is just one of the sites to have benefited from past Retro Remakes competitions

Everyone loves free stuff and great remakes, so what could be better than a competition that combines the two? Popular remakes site Retro Remakes is teaming up with Retro Gamer and several other sponsors to offer budding programmers the chance to show off their home-brew projects and hopefully win some great prizes. (A complete list will be supplied next issue). Eager to tell you more, we spoke to site and competition organizer Rob Fearon.

RG: So Rob, tell us a little background about the competition.
RF: The original idea was suggested back in late 2002. After a lot of work from the then admin team of Hitm4n, The Toker and Flynn to gather a crowd of decent sponsors together, it finally saw fruition in 2003.

Although, I still believe it was just a cunning ruse to get somebody in the community to remake that old Spectrum classic *Wheelie*…

RG: And what sort of response have you been receiving?
RF: The first two competitions saw over 150 new remakes made, a huge amount of which were of fantastic quality and covered a wide range of genres. It never fails to amaze me at just what a wonderful response we get to these competitions, in terms of both quantity and quality. The only real downside is that they take so much time to organise – normally eight months from start to finish.

What I'm most proud of though is one of last year's competitions. Having been made aware of the fantastic work that Barrie Ellis does at oneswitch.org.uk in making gaming accessible to all – we quickly threw together an off-the-cuff competition to attempt to bolster the available catalogue of one-switch games. People flocked from many different development communities to enter and gave us a final tally of over 70 one-switch games with barely a duffer amongst them.

I still end up grinning like a lunatic when I think just how much wonderful work people achieved for a great cause.

RG: So have winners of previous competitions gone on to bigger and better things in the industry?
RF: One of the things I adore about the remakes community is that a good 99 per cent of the folks involved in it do it purely for the love of the games. There's very little commercial or business motivation amongst us when it comes to sitting down and recreating these titles. Many of us are simply living out the dream of bedroom coding and having fun in the bargain.

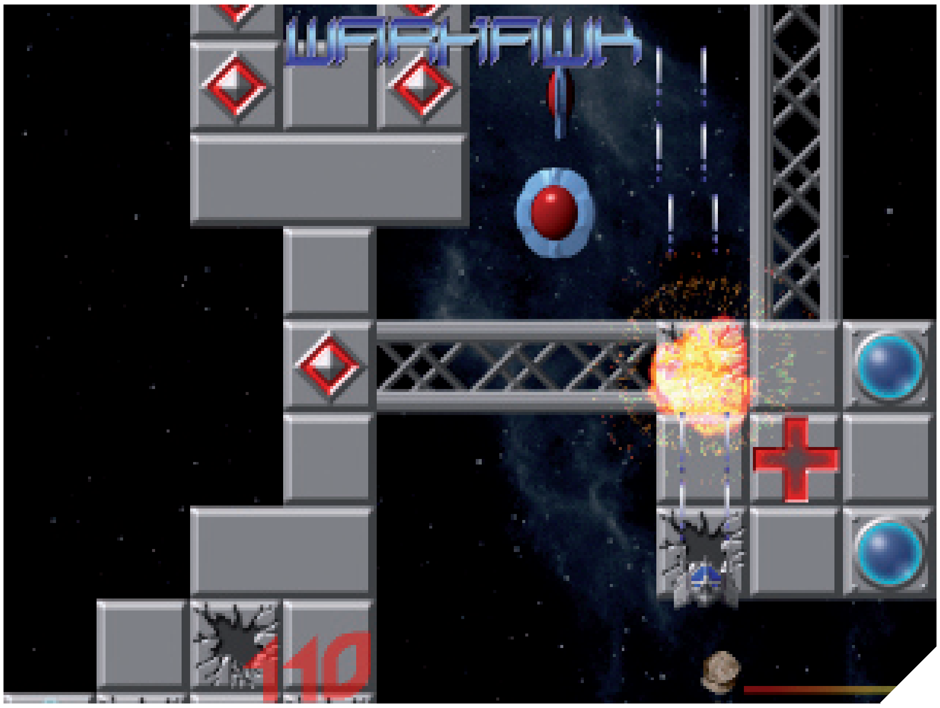
Having said that, I think major congratulations should go to the team behind *Strange Attractors*, one of our one-switch entries – which, thanks to their fabulous work on a truly innovative little game found themselves nominated for an award at this years Independent Gaming Festival.

RG: So what sponsorship do you have lined up for this year's competition?
RF: We're kicking off proceedings on June 1st when the rules will be released to all-and-sundry and the coding can commence. Then it's the wonderful part where we can sit back for three whole months whilst people code up their entries.

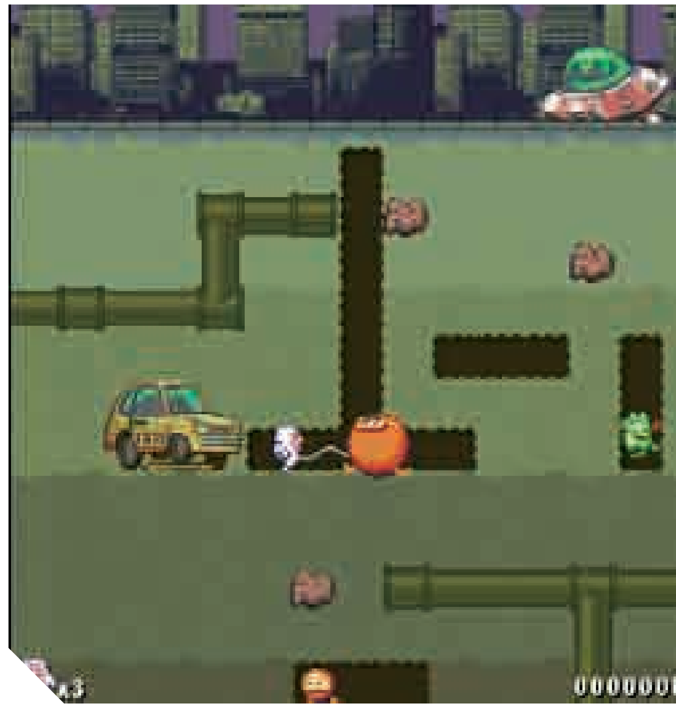
Thanks to hard work from TCK, we've got around £3,000 worth of prizes to give away from the likes of Natural Point, Idigicon, The Game Creators, Garage Games, X-Arcade, GBAX, Cosmigo, Clickteam, Puppy Games, Underwear Design, GLBasic and of course Retro Gamer. We'll also be welcoming Barrie back at One Switch to assist with some of the rules.

RG: What sort of things are you looking for in this year's competition?
RF: I can sum up my hopes for the competition in one sentence. Good remakes of good games that anyone can play, regardless of their ability.

We've carefully designed the rules so that anyone can enter regardless of their niche, be it game making, graphics or sound – whatever floats your boat – there's a chance for you to win something. If we can get over 100 remakes this year that would be the real icing on the cake for me.



» Smila's *Warhawk* is a great homage and is a must for shoot-'em-up fans. Expect a review in next month's issue



» Aaarrggh! It's *Dig Dug* again. This time around it has a funky space theme

RG: And who will be judging?

RF: This year we have five judges on the panel. Three of the Retro Remakes team: our web guru STompy, myself and of course TCK. Our other two reviewers are a pair of our forum moderators who have taken the brave step of volunteering: Ian Price and Gordon King. Between us, we have wildly differing tastes in games and an immense knowledge of games from a variety of systems over the years, so chances are – no matter how obscure the title – one of us will probably have played it before and more than likely, played it to death. Whilst we may not all agree on our favourite genre or game, we are all agreed that we can't wait to get our hands on what's produced this year – after all, we're here for the same thing. A love of great games.

RG: So how can any budding developers reading Retro Gamer enter?

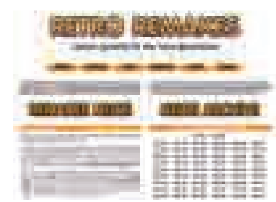
RF: Through the back door like everyone else… Failing that, we welcome entries from anybody really, regardless of how they perceive their ability and written in whatever language or development environment they choose – be it a gamemaker or C++. It's the game that counts at the end of the day not your technical know how. Just drop on over to the forum at www.retroremakes.com and come and join in the fun.

RG: What are the most popular remakes?

RF: You tend to find that the games that were most loved, invariably become the most popular remakes – so when someone remakes *Manic Miner*, that's usually more popular than say, a remake of *Trollie Wallie*. For me, I'm in love with some of the more obscure remakes out there – games like TCK's *TransversionEX* and its *Yak*-influenced visuals, Gordon King's version of Pete Cooke's *Brainstorm* and more recently Sokurah's *Omega Race*.

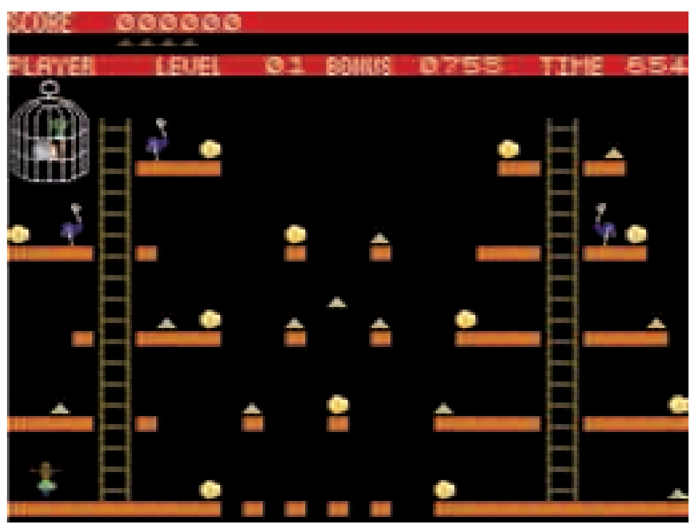
I play pretty much every remake that passes through RR's doors and enjoy a good 80% of them. If I didn't run RR, I'd still be an avid fan of all the hard work every remaker puts in. (That's not to say that because I work here, I'm not!)

If you want to know more about Retro Remake's 2006 competition head on over to http://www.retroremakes.com/competitions.php. We will be featuring a complete rundown of the eventual winners and their entries later this year.



» Head on over to Retro Remakes' website and check out their friendly forum. It's great

» *Chuckie Egg* is another game that's been given a fresh lick of paint and released on Retro Remakes. It's as fun now as it ever was





» There's plenty of classic games available, so you're quite likely to find all sorts of great stuff if you're prepared to look for it



» *Total Eclipse* is one of the finest remakes we've played for some time; for information on Ovine Design's *Driller* turn the page

DEVELOPER DIARY

AFTER COMPLETING THE REMAKE OF TOTAL ECLIPSE, WE DECIDED TO GO BACK TO DRILLER, THE GAME THAT KICK-STARTED THE FREESCAPE SERIES IN 1987. THE ONLY WAY TO TRULY REMAKE A GAME FROM THE EIGHTIES IS TO GO BACK AND LIVE IT, SO WITH A MIX OF ILLUSTRIOUS ARTISTS FROM 'NOW THAT'S WHAT I CALL MUSIC 9' WAILING AWAY IN THE BACKGROUND, WE PAUSE TO WONDER WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO PEPSI & SHIRLEY...

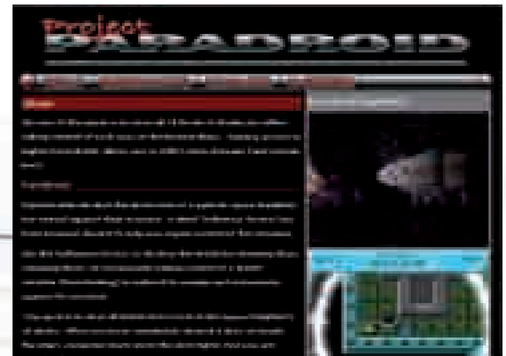


» Some of the laser effects we've been messing about with…

THESE ARE THE DIARIES OF ANDY & STU – THE OVINE BOYS

UPDATE TIME...

Not content with beavering away on our new version of *Driller*, we've also decided to help out Smila (Trevor Storey) with his *Paradroid* remake. We've made a fair amount of progress so far, but now it's time for the hard graft to start.



» The *Project Paradroid* Website is now up and running; it does the job perfectly and has already received plenty of hits



» We've not forgotten that this development diary is supposed to be about *Driller*, honest

Tuesday 28th March

Who ever thought of making 5am in the morning 6am? I can cope with getting up at six in the morning but not five. Damn those daylight-saving scientists. With an hour misplaced I have recovered enough tonight to push the latest objects to the level editor! Next on the list... the exotic Malachite. Stu, in *Paradroid* land, has more or less got the robot hacking screens working.

Wednesday 29th March

Started on the laser code tonight for *Driller*, trying a couple of different ways; Andy wants a *Star Trek* style. Tidied the save/load game and included the new gas pocket information. Meanwhile, in *Paradroid* we have received the intro music from Infamous; it fits right into the style of the game. Added it to my play list, I find listening to music keeps my enthusiasm, on the other hand if I switch my TV on in my computer rooms it only serves as a distraction. Major problem with robots getting stuck on each other. Decided an overhaul was needed – damn it's 11:30pm, a quick fix instead.



Thursday 30th March

Quick fix didn't work. So I've decided that a whole new routine has to be written instead. To test out the formula (given to us from TNT – thanks) I've combined them all into an EXCEL worksheet for proofing. We decided that they have to be tweaked somewhat to give the player a fighting chance.

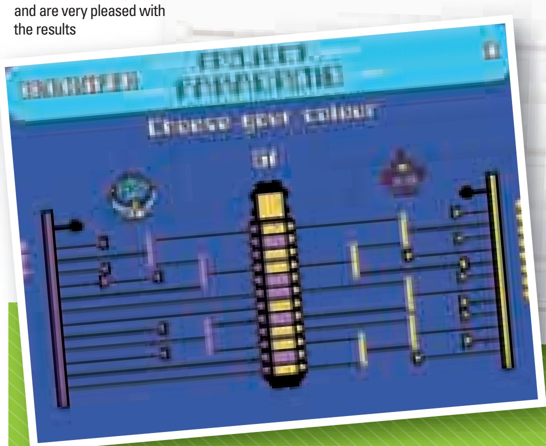
Monday 3rd April

Spooky day today, the compiled executables size came to exactly 666. Hope that's not a bad omen! To coincide with this phenomenon, Smila spotted a rogue Droid walking through a wall. Thankfully I tracked it down to a misplaced waypoint that instructed him to do so (I can put my crucifix away now).

Found time to update the title screen with retro scrolling message, also put in the local high score table code.

The intro sequence (a short 12 second 'flyby' of the *Paradroid* ship) is in dire need of its music. I sent a copy of the intro to Paul, our music guru. No sooner had I fired an email to Paul than the music arrived in my inbox. It sets the scene perfectly – job done.

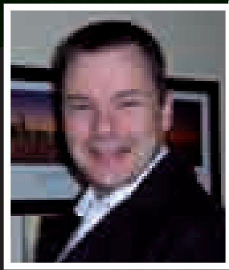
» We've been tinkering away with the Transfer system and are very pleased with the results



Wednesday 5th April

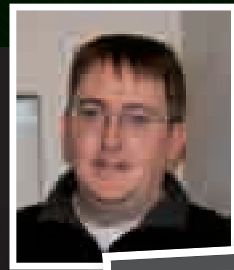
Throughout the development of *Paradroid* we've been testing like madmen.

As I've been placing the sound effects (lifted from the original) found the odd little bug here and there. I've tried hard to contain the silky smooth scrolling to the expense that the user's graphics card must have VSYNC turned on. Must remember to put a note in the read-me about it.... tried it on six machines at work and it runs like a dream on all of them. This includes some really old machines too.



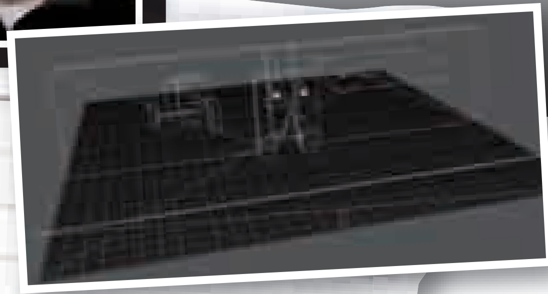
NAME: STUART COLLIER
JOB: IT MANAGER
FAVOURITE GAMES: CHOLO, BRUCE LEE OR IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
FIRST REMAKE: JETPAC ON THE PC
LIKES: THE FRIENDLINESS OF THE RETRO COMMUNITY

NAME: ANDY HEWITT
JOB: WEB DEVELOPER, TEAM LEADER
FAVOURITE GAMES: GRADIUS, STORMBRINGER, ELITE AND MANY MORE!
FIRST REMAKE: BOULDERDASH CALLED THE ROCKFORD FILES
LIKES: CALL OF DUTY 2, OUTRUN 2006 AND GENERAL NINTENDO GAMES



Sunday 9th April

Coming to the end of the game now, Smila's bug list has dried up so enlisted the help of Hitm4n to do some testing for us. It's always good to get an external person(s) to test; being neutral if they don't like something, they'll tell you (even if the thing they don't like took days of coding … %#%$!).



» Malachite is really starting to come together now; with *Project Paradroid* complete we can once again concentrate on *Driller*

Monday 10th April

Put together a website to hold the essential information, the high score pages and of course the download. Andy's been too distracted from *Driller* recently with the end in sight on *Paradroid*, so the website is not going to be a big affair. Just the essentials.

Wednesday 12th April

Putting the web-code together and some simple CSS. Not had much time to think about layout, so just going to go for it and see what comes out. Linked in the high score page to show the top 100 scores.





» We've worked our arses off on Project Paradroid, but judging by all the responses it's been well worth the effort

Thursday 13th April

Website almost done now. Screenshots of the game at exciting moments in both our remake and the original C64 version have been captured by Smila and have been liberally littered around the site. Wrapped everything up, as we usually do in an installer created with Install Maker Pro.

Friday 14th April

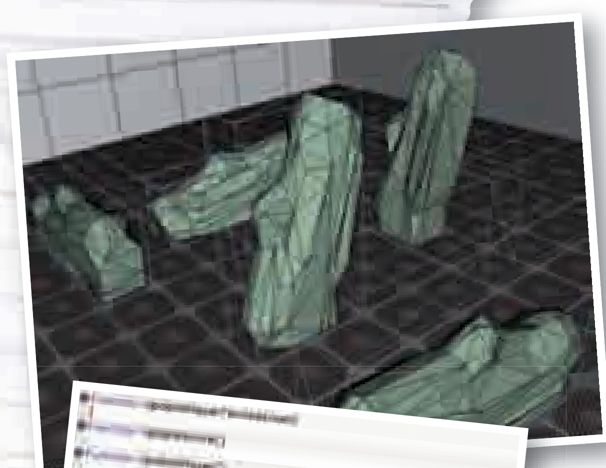
Website finished, game released. No sooner do we upload the packed game, 24 downloads suddenly appear. We have a few suspects *cough* Caffinekid *cough* Oddbob *cough* but no firm evidence…

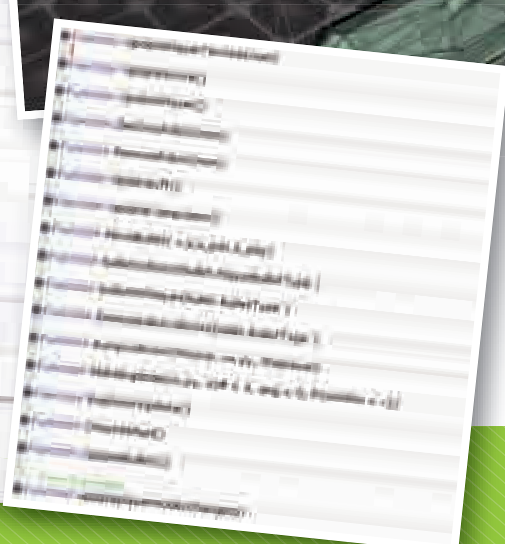
It's been a quick turnaround for an immensely popular game, this was helped by the fact that Smila had most of the graphics sorted before I started the project, plus any additional changes were done at super Smila speed. I just hope people like it as much as we do… We can now return 100% of our time to *Driller*. We've put a mail rule to divert all Smila's mails to our spam box… only kidding mate. Or are we…

Sunday 16th April

A few bugs and enhancements to make to *Paradroid*, thanks to loads of feedback. And a bug in the online high scores has crept in. Partly due to the change from a ten score upload back to a one score upload. Does mean that some of our top scorers have had their achievements bumped off?

Guess you can't catch 'em all, no matter what a certain Nintendo franchise would lead you to believe. Thankfully with the combination of logs and the local scores of those affected, we've put them all back to rights.





» Just an example of some of the code we've been working on. It's not all game testing you know

Monday 17th April

Work has started on some of those enhancements; namely, the transfer game was too easy. The pointer would stay in the same position after you fired off a logic pulse, but now made it work the same as the C64 version and it gets reset to the top. Also, somehow, I don't know how, the 999 droid had managed to escape and refused to show up in the released game. Will recapture this elusive droid and make sure he appears in the next version.

Now we can return to *Driller*…

RETRO SCENE

Remake of the Month

EVERY MONTH WE LOOK AT OUR FAVOURITE REMAKES; THIS MONTH IT'S PROJECT PARADROID AND STOP THE EXPRESS

retro GAMER SIZZLER

STOP THE EXPRESS

ONE GAME YOU MUST CATCH

» *Stop The Express* achieved second place in the 2004 Retro Remakes competition



- » **FORMAT:** PC
- » **RELEASE DATE:** 2004
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** DAVID COOPER
- » **LINK:** HTTP://WWW.JDGAMES CO.UK/GAMES/EXPRESS.HTML
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY

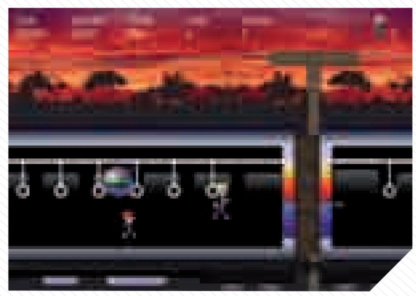
Classic games come in all shapes and forms; not all are smashes or sizzlers. This doesn't always reflect the game's quality however, moreover the time that the game was released and how it was understood in its day. A great example of this is *Stop The Express*; released in 1983 by Hudsonsoft/Sinclair research it displayed simple mechanics and graphics that were seldom matched on its home system. It achieved little success as it was released in the formative years of the spectrum and was dismissed as history by the time Sir Clive's machine had its heyday. David Cooper knew this and as such brings the game right up to date in this remake.



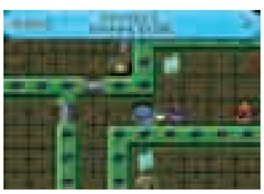
» It looks great and plays like a dream. What more could you possibly ask for?

The first thing you notice about *Stop The Express* is that it's absolutely gorgeous; the second thing you notice usually while you're thinking about the first thing is that it's tough – running along the roof-top of a speeding train, jumping from carriage to carriage, if you blink you fall, if you don't blink you get shot anyway, is not easy. This game isn't aimed at today's challenge-starved gamers. It moves like lightning, the vistas in the background dazzle and the character art is reminiscent of early SNK games. Inside and out this game oozes quality and challenge. Hard as it is you can't stop playing it and the game can be learnt; reminiscent in places of *Elevator Action* you really can't afford to miss this whether you played the original or not. Find it and play it.

RATING **94%**



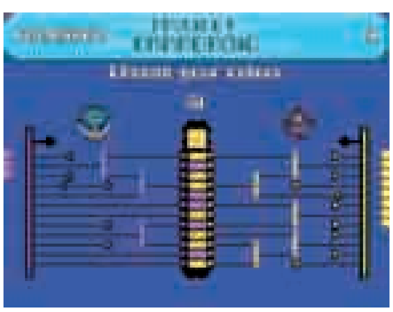
PROJECT PARADROID



- » **FORMAT:** PC
- » **RELEASE DATE:** OUT NOW
- » **DEVELOPED BY:** OVINE BY DESIGN AND TREVOR SMILA STOREY
- » **LINK:** HVIEW.PHP?LINK=HOH
- » **REVIEWED BY:** MIKE TOOLEY

THERE'S NO GOING BACK

***Paradroid* stylised and benchmarked the CBM 64 scene of the mid-Eighties, and was famed for its use of parallax scrolling.** It went on to become a precursor to the games that cemented the C64's reputation for incredible sound and scrolling, and made its author quite famous at the time too – step forward Andrew Braybrook. A couple of *Paradroid* remakes have short-circuited before inception, but finally Ovine by Design and Smila have brought *Paradroid* back to the fore. After a very polished cutscene *Project Paradroid* loads and you can't help feel that if the C64 was around today this is exactly how game front ends would look like on it; visually striking, it features great music that adds further substance to an already great atmosphere. The game itself looks excellent; the ship is represented as a thriving mass of corridors and levels. Danger lurks through every door and around every turn. The animation on the droids is fluid and the screen scrolls ever so smoothly. Then there is the genius pace. Initially your droid 001 feels terribly underpowered, especially as you just want to move around all guns blazing. Aggressiveness won't help you here though; *Paradroid* is very much a strategic run-and-gun affair, at times slow like *Hexic*, at others frenetic like *Berzerk*. Nearly flawless in its execution, it stacks up to be a fantastic remake.



» Controlling other droids now looks better than ever

There are a couple of minor niggles, but only one warrants a mention here, namely lack of a save option, 20 levels is a lot to ask of today's gamers in one sitting. Finally, *Project Paradroid* also has a facility to upload your hi-score to the Ovine servers – an inspired touch. Go get!

RATING **89%**



» *Project Paradroid* gets quite hectic at times: are you man enough to complete it?

EMULATE THIS

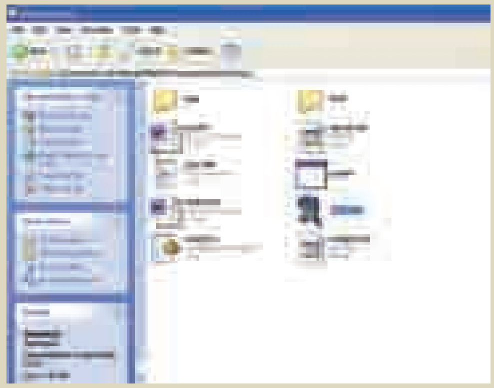
EVERY MONTH RETRO GAMER WILL BE GIVING YOU A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO THE WORLD OF EMULATION. TO TIE IN WITH OUR FEATURED MACHINE, THIS MONTH WE'LL BE LOOKING AT THE AMSTRAD CPC 464

WinAPE32

For lapsed Amstrad fans and those that missed Sir Alan's machines first time around there really is only one emulator of choice, and it covers them all from the humble CPC 464 through to the GX4000.



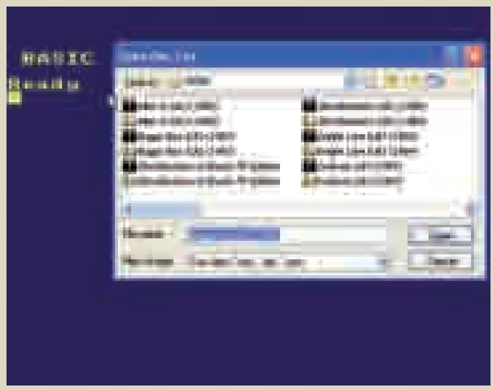
STEP ONE Head over to the official site http://winape.emuunlim.com/. Take a look around the site; there is a lot of information available here about the emu scene at large. Download the latest version of WinAPE32. WinAPE32 has an automatic update built in so you won't need to frequently update, however check back occasionally because at the time of writing the update facility is not totally reliable. Make a new file and place it in My Documents, extract the downloaded WinAPE32 zipped file into your new file.



STEP 2 Unlike most new emulators WinAPE32 doesn't read zipped ROMs. So create a different file in My Documents to store and download any ROMs that you are entitled to play. Once you have done this, extract each zipped ROM file into the ROM directory of WinAPE32. Now we can start proper; locate your emulator file and double click on the WinAPE32 icon. The emulator will load automatically. Once loaded, press 1 on your numerical pad or the cartridge game burning rubber will load automatically.



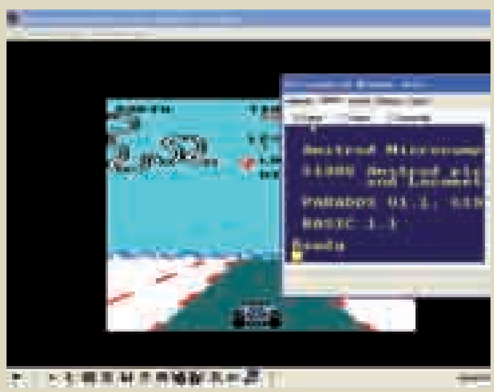
STEP 3 If you can remember any, feel free to play around with some easy basic programmes; Z80-based, Amstrad basic isn't so far removed from ZX basic. People of a certain age might be able to make some things work on it, especially if you have an old input magazine handy. The file option at the top the screen contains the emulators loading options. Most of the Amstrad's back catalogue has been put into disk format, negating the need for the tape option, so disk it is.



STEP 4 Highlight Drive A and a sub menu appears. Highlight and click on Insert Disk image; this opens the folder that holds all the extracted ROMs. Highlight the Disk image of the game you want to play and press open. WinAPE32 returns to the original screen, to run the disc, so try this. Type run "diskname". Because of the different hardware versions WinAPE32 emulates, the designers stayed true to the loading format of each system rather than having to reconfigure the emulator. Other techniques follow.



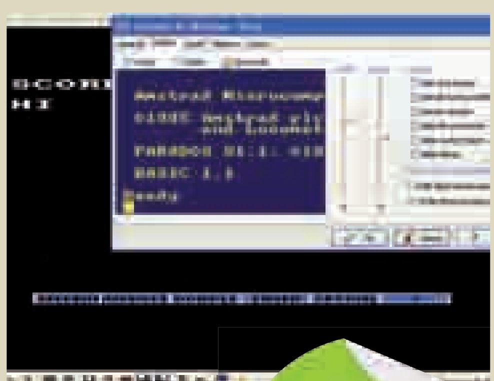
STEP 5 If the above hasn't worked try one of the following run "diskname", the comma does make a difference. Some later games used Amstrad's dos commands, for these use | CPM (hold shift and press [to get the | symbol). For disk images that don't respond to any of these methods type cat, the file that ends in .BAS is the command, so pac.BAS would need Run "pac". For cartridge games just click on the cartridge icon at the bottom of the screen, select the game and it auto loads.



STEP 6 Now that a game has finally loaded you may want to change some of the emulator's settings. Under the settings option all WinAPE32's settings are at your disposal, so lets have a look. Input illustrates the original Amstrad keyboard and denotes how it maps to your PC keyboard Note how the function keys are mapped to the numerical pad; when WinAPE32 needs a function key it refers to the mapped version. Joypads are already configured. You can redefine keys in each game if you need to.



STEP 7 The memory option displays a series of checkboxes to improve performance, however post Windows 95 PC's run WinAPE32 perfectly with everything on. The sound option allows you to turn sound off or on and change its delivery method, sound card, speakers, stereo or mono and so on – just check the boxes. Also in the sound option is a slider that allows you to change a games sound timing if it doesn't fit the visuals; speed or slow the sound by moving the slider accordingly.



STEP 8 The display setting allows you to choose the monitor display from the three Amstrad originals: green, greyscale and colour; just check the box you want to use. Sliders allow you to change the brightness and vertical hold of the display, while check boxes allow you to chose 8 and 16 bit displays. The general tab changes the emulators speed and allows you to turn automatic updates on or off, while enabling you to choose what WinAPE32 emulates; again just check the boxes.

Note: WinAPE32 supports all windows formats but is not currently available for other systems. The assembler options and debug modes are designed for the home-brew community and as such haven't been covered here. If you want to emulate CPC games on the Macintosh your best bet is to try Arnold, which can be found at http://www.bannister.org/software/arnold.htm

EMULATION NATION



» Unofficially translated games are still available through MSX fairs. Deltasoft's *Xak 1* displayed at the Tilburg 2004 convention



» On the left are key figures from Oasis, attending Zandvoort's 1995 MSX fair: Marcel Kok and founder Dennis Lardenoye. To their right is Bernard Lamers



» A nice surprise is the cameo appearances of community figures, such as Nightcrawler of TransCorp in Dual Orb 2

JAPANESE ROM TRANSLATION

Ever since Japan first began dabbling in videogames, and despite Working Designs fighting valiantly, many great titles were released there and never officially translated into other languages. With highly desirable, text-heavy Japanese games being painfully ignored by publishers over the years, it fell to ragtag teams of guerrilla ROM hackers and translators to make them accessible. Despite their incredibly important role these groups are mostly ignored by the press, while their dedicated history pages are removed from the internet. Defiantly, Retro Gamer proudly salutes these unsung heroes and here records their deeds for posterity.

> "I RAN ACROSS A PROGRAMMER'S NOTES, RELATING HOW HE GOT DRUNK AT HIS COMPUTER AND WOKE UP WITH A LIQUOR SOAKED KEYBOARD."
> MR FILLER

Everyone interested in importing will have played a fan-translated ROM at some point. The emulation of fan-translations, unless you have rewritable flash media or disk-based copiers, makes the world of videogames a more exciting place. These homemade creations are the only way to fully enjoy many fantastic RPGs. Sometimes, unofficial translations are even better than the official equivalents done by developers!

The origins of this unspoken art are hidden behind layers of pre-Internet lore, sparsely documented. The consensus is the origins go back to Holland and the MSX hobby scene, with the foundation of translation group Oasis in 1993. This is unsurprising since the MSX was a Japanese series of home computers that achieved respectable market success in Europe (especially Holland). Owners of the system developed a taste for Japanese titles, so when domestic releases prematurely stopped they turned to importing.

Veterans on MSX.org, many of whom were around during these early days, had anecdotes to share: A gentleman named Koen Dols founded a disk-based MSX magazine called FutureDisk, which focused on Japanese games. This bolstered the interest in import titles, and a community spirit was formed as fans helped each other prevail over complex Japanese RPGs. While such importing spirits were being forged, FutureDisk took on Dennis Lardenoye as a writer. He would, along with Ron Bouwland, later found Oasis in order to translate these games. Their first project was Kojima's RPG, *SD-Snatcher*, a highly anticipated game officially only released in Japan.

A Belgium forumite elaborated, "After the success of the *SD-Snatcher* translation (more than 250 copies were sold at the first fair!), they quickly started working on other titles. At some point Ron left Oasis and Marcel Kok and Eelco Slaaf joined. Marcel [particularly] helped to increase the quality of the translations, since he was a 2nd year Japanese student." Such events exemplify the way things were done: optimistic youngsters ignored by the corporations, with a little talent, skill and hard work, banding together to change things single-handedly.

Though MSX star Cas Cremers revealed an interesting fact that predates Oasis. "Before [*SD-Snatcher*] we hacked the character sets of *Dragonslayer VI*, putting phonetic letters in place of the Japanese symbols. You'd locate a Japanese character block (8x8 pixels) and look it up in a translation table. [Maybe] it says 'SU'. You then redraw [those letters] in a 3x7 pixel font, [thereby fitting] the two into the original block. [Do this for the whole font]. Now when the game says 'disuku 2' you're supposed to change disks. It was much easier to remember item names in English instead of Japanese characters."

BEYOND THE MSX

I spoke with many of the translation pioneers who congregate at ROMhacking.net (which hosts a huge library of translation patches). By its very nature, fan-translations (or ROM hacking, since they're intertwined), are linked to taboo subjects like ROM dumping, emulation, and piracy. As a result, they're mentioned only by their online pseudonyms.

Questioning the issue of legal sensitivity, their answers were forthright. The renowned Gideon Zhi responded quickly, "I generally don't work on games that are new or still in production, and I like to think that in the case of sequels that are getting US releases (such as *Metal Saga*) I'm adding an extra bump of enthusiasm for the game. Free marketing, maybe?" While community leader Nightcrawler elaborated "As a representative of our community, I would say nobody here feels that anything legitimises ROMs or changes the law books. We all understand what's going on here, but we also view it as preservation of classic games and many times the ONLY chance of playing some

MANY GREAT GAMES HAVE BEEN LEFT IN JAPAN, HIDDEN BEHIND A COMPLEX LANGUAGE. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK SPEAKS WITH THOSE WHO PIONEERED VIDEOGAME FAN-TRANSLATIONS, BARELY MANAGING TO SQUEEZE THEIR HISTORY INTO FOUR PAGES.

WHAT, NO ESPERANTO?



Fan-translations are produced in most languages (even Serbian and Vietnamese!) where that society has PC's capable of emulation. The aforementioned Professor gave a fascinating account of things in China, "[Over here], a lot of low-quality hacks are done on PSX games and sold on CD together with an emulator. Two years ago I found a partial Chinese translation of *Langrisser IV*. I ended up doing a comparison against my Japanese disc to create a patch file for the Chinese. Most of the older cartridge games are very poor translation hacks done in Taiwan and Hong Kong. I also have a fascinating Chinese fan translation of *Terranigma* initially released in ROM form rather than sold on cartridge (meaning it's likely a hobbyist project instead of a pirate)." He described the PSX scenario as very similar to the one in Russia. While information is sparse, there have been no reported serious attempts to translate large English-only games to Japanese.

great titles never released here that, quite honestly, people feel we were robbed of." He then raised an important point regarding *Final Fantasy* developers Square, and their attitude towards the West, "I feel that when a company [decides its] U.S. audience is too stupid to handle complex RPGs, or won't notice changing [title] numbers, I've been robbed of an opportunity." The complaints are valid, since many Japanese devcos felt Western audiences couldn't handle their RPGs, while others misled us. How many Retro Gamer readers still have their 'Warrior World' newsletters from Enix, promising that *Dragon Quest V* was ready for release?

Despite copiers allowing console games to be traded in the early Nineties via BBS and run on original hardware using floppy disks, the post-MSX translation scene didn't pick up until around 1996 with the proliferation of PC based emulation. Finding precise details is difficult, though most agree Final Fantasy V was the game which grabbed everyone's attention. It was the 'lost *FF* game' for the SNES, with *FFIV* coming Stateside as *II*, and *FFVI* being renamed *III*, so people understandably wanted to experience it in English. Online sites and alliances were formed, work on projects began, and then we reach what veterans describe as 'dark years filled with teenage melodrama'.

This era even has its own illustrious title, 'The *FF* Translation Wars', and alone warrants an article. Members directed me towards Snakeyes.org, which covers events in greater detail and contains fascinating interviews. While Googling this feature is recommended for an in-depth analysis on events, they can be summarised as occurring mainly because of personality clashes amid what were at the time, tech savvy kids with language skills.

There was rivalry between groups to be the first to release a patch, exacerbated by some games such as *Romancing Saga* frustrating the hackers and translators on a technical level. With everything being unofficial, some stole other's work and passed it off as their own. Nearly everyone admitted to clasping their rapiers on various projects (*FF3j*, *Treasure Hunter G*, even *DQV*).





» DeJap translations has a reputation for taking too many scripting liberties, like in *Tales Of Phantasia*

ROMHACKING 101

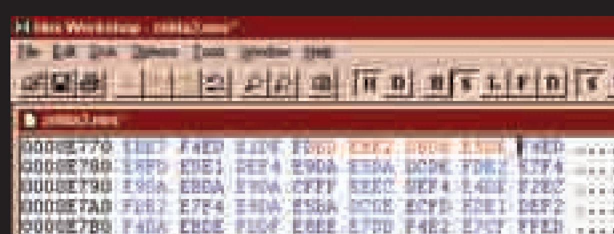
RETRO GAMER PRESENTS A SIMPLIFIED LAYMAN'S GUIDE TO ROMHACKING

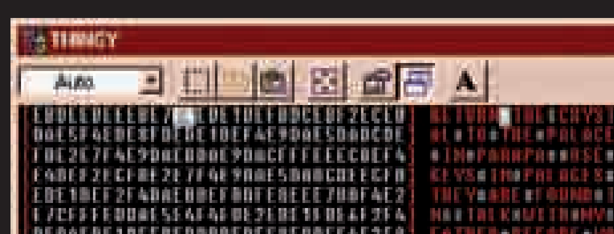
Creating a translation patch demands a marriage of hacker and translator; technology and art; hexadecimal code and poetic licence. But technically speaking, what actually happens on the honeymoon?

For cartridges the ROM is dumped, while for optical media most PCs should be able to extract needed data. Translation methods vary depending on how the data is organised, and can be extremely difficult depending on game mechanics, types of compression used, and how text is stored and accessed. Few store text in ASCII format (basically what you're reading now), so specialist hexadecimal tools are needed (though some use assembly). Games contain graphics-based text tables, with each character block having a corresponding hex code that displays it. While normal decimals deal with ten figures (0-9), hexadecimal deals with 16 figures (0-F) where two digits can represent values from 0-255. For example: The letter "N" might be represented by the code "E7".

To find which value corresponds to specific letters in the graphics table, hackers will change values while observing text. Through trial and error they can decipher things and create a conversion table, eventually dumping the text, making it easy to read. Here the translators take over and work their magic. Hackers also need to replace the Japanese symbols in the graphics table with an English font; many already contain one but are normally unusable. Once each sentence has been translated, they need to be reinserted into the game by altering each hex value based on the new graphics table.

A patch is then made. This contains lists of entries which changes data at specific places in the code. When you use a patching program, it goes to the listed sections and inserts the new specified data. When the game decides to show a specific word, this new coding tells it to load a different graphics character, and voila! Il est Anglais!





EMULATION NATION

MANY GREAT GAMES HAVE BEEN LEFT IN JAPAN, HIDDEN BEHIND A COMPLEX LANGUAGE. JOHN SZCZEPANIAK SPEAKS WITH THOSE WHO PIONEERED VIDEOGAME FAN-TRANSLATIONS AND REVEALS A FASCINATING, UNTOLD HISTORY

"MANY OF US HAVE CREATED TRANSLATIONS EXCEEDING COMMERCIAL QUALITY. MAKES YOU WONDER WHAT THE HELL [COMPANY] EMPLOYEES WERE GETTING PAID TO DO!" MR BYUU

MEAN MACHINES

Discovering which machine has the most translations is not simple. A quick archive search on ROMhacking.net reveals the SNES has the most overall patches, at 245, but only 80 of these are listed as finished. The NES meanwhile only has 222, though at least 118 of those are complete. Matters are confused further when you realise some games don't have much text and only the title screens needed translating (*Altered Beast*). Despite some describing the translation scene as myopic because it focuses primarily on NES and SNES games, nearly all systems, including CD based ones, are catered for to varying degrees. Work has been done on NEC PC-98, Wonderswan, NGCD, Saturn, Dreamcast and even NDS titles. Though with inefficient emulation for the latter three, progress has been slow. Those awaiting DeJap's *Samurai Showdown* RPG patch will be sad to hear the group has disbanded.

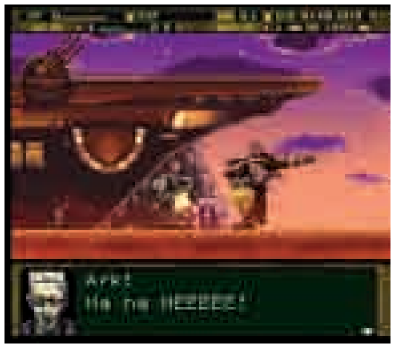




» The gibberish lower down is called 'cavespeak', occurring when replacing font tables without actually altering the text



» *Assault Suits Valken*: A game truly deserving retranslation, since many things were totally removed from *Cybernator*



» *Gun Hazard* is one hell of an awesome game: Mecha action, plus a complex political plot that's been fantastically translated

Thankfully things mostly settled down over the following decade. One member, now a University Professor in China, explained, "Drama was rampant. It [was] amplified by people not knowing how to ignore trolls who were just looking to provoke even more. The scene tended to embrace [drama], fan its flames, and then bitch about it for the next year after realizing how stupid it was."

OTHER FACTORS

Beyond playing games in English, and egos, I asked what motivates them. With a cheeky zest Mr Filler revealed something which warrants standalone articles. "You sometimes discover 'hidden treasure'. I ran across a bunch of programmer's notes in *Lady Sword*, relating things like the time he got drunk at his computer and woke up with a liquor soaked keyboard, or his views on the cold war. That's pretty rare stuff." Suddenly the discussion heated up regarding what's hidden beneath the code, and I was shown a frankly bizarre section of hidden text from *Emerald Dragon* on SFC, where a female-character-designer spoke about having his own harem, before listing his real-life address and phone number! Hacking the text has revealed several programmers' musings over the years.

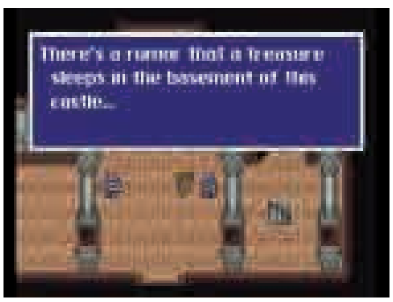
If anyone thinks such motivation results in poor translations, they're mistaken! While it's estimated that 70 per cent of projects never reach completion, due to starting for the wrong reasons, those that are completed often surpass official translations. Numerous people share the views of Mr Byuu, "Many of us have created translations far exceeding commercial quality (*BOF2*, *Terranigma*) in half the time it took commercial companies to do the same. It wasn't so much our skill, as it was the companies' lack thereof. Makes you wonder what the hell their employees were getting paid to do! They didn't even have to reverse-engineer anything or write tools. And with millions of dollars to hire talent, it's just sad some of the stuff we ended up getting stuck with."

Despite fewer resources and occasional internal strife, these lexical guerrillas are beating the corporations on their own territory. There have been several examples of already translated games being re-translated from Japanese to English, because the official translations were poor, or censored. Popular examples being *Breath Of Fire 2*, *Assault Suits Valken*, and *Metal Gear*, which had a missing 40 per cent worth of text restored.

But it's more than mere translating; these groups have an understanding for good localisation. A great patch they say needs three things: a good grasp of English and Japanese, respect for source material, and respect for the target audience. Translate too literally and the game comes across as dry and no longer fun. Change things too much and it reads like it's trying too hard, taking away from the atmosphere. While few take liberties, there have been infamous examples. Each agrees that balance is key, but you won't please everyone.

Today the community is stronger than before, with increased and ever slicker releases. They're also setting precedents by working on recent titles that have been ignored (such as *Gyakuten Saiban 3* on GBA), and investigating the possibilities of working with NDS, PSP, and other recent software. Forever may they succeed!

SPECIAL THANKS
Special thanks to ROMhacking.net and MSX.org for providing resources and assistance. Many thanks to all those who answered questions, recalled events, and of course actually produce the translations!



» *Final Fantasy V* is probably the most famous fan-translation ever; many cite it as the reason they got into this hobby

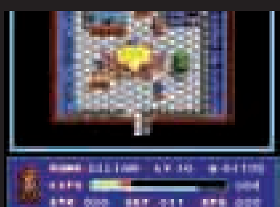


» *Gunman's Proof*: A quaint little *Zelda* clone. The emphasis is on action and *Earthbound*-style humour

PATCHING JAPANESE

HUNDREDS (CLOSE TO A THOUSAND) TRANSLATION PATCHES EXIST, FOR NEARLY EVERY SINGLE GAMES SYSTEM EVER, ALL IN VARIOUS STAGES OF PROGRESS. THESE FIVE ARE SOME OF THE MORE IMPORTANT RELEASES.





SD-SNATCHER

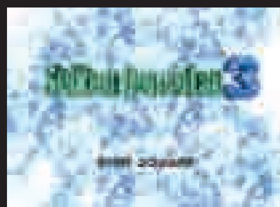
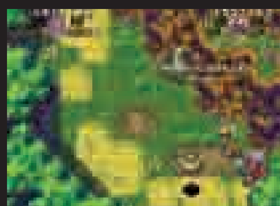
» **SYSTEM:** MSX

» **GAME RELEASED:** 1990

» **TRANSLATION RELEASED:** 1993

» **TRANSLATION BY:** DENNIS LARDENOYE & RON BOUWLAND

Regardless of your thoughts on the actual game (some loathe it due to horrendous balancing problems, whilst others can't live without it), it was the landmark release within the translation community. The very first translation patch from Dutch group Oasis, they worked using only a disk editor by loading modified character-sets into VRAM and then looking for text to translate. They later had help from Xelasoft, which made the patch-disk and new copy protection routines. Mr Bouwland apparently wasn't fluent in Japanese and often used a dictionary, making it more of a reinterpretation, and despite losing 40% of text due to space, overall it's regarded highly. They even managed to sneak some jokes in!


SEIKEN DENSETSU 3

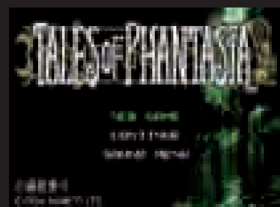
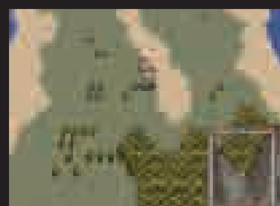
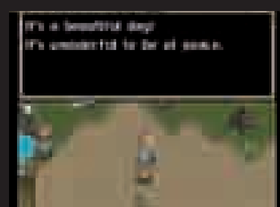
» **SYSTEM:** SUPER FAMICOM

» **GAME RELEASED:** 1995

» **TRANSLATION RELEASED:** 2000

» **TRANSLATION BY:** NEILL CORLETT, SOM2FREAK, LNF TRANSLATIONS

Instead of releasing this in the West (it was nearly ready), Square decided to release *Secret Of Evermore*. This made *SD3* the only game in the series not to be released in English. Thankfully the translation community corrected Square's grievous error. It was subsequently translated into a variety of other languages, including recently Spanish. There was controversy when unofficial English cartridges began surfacing on eBay, without the permission of Square or the translation group! The script is highly acclaimed, since SoM2Freak is described as an obsessive perfectionist when it comes to accuracy and authenticity. We must admit his vision for *SD3* was quite breathtaking!

TALES OF PHANTASIA

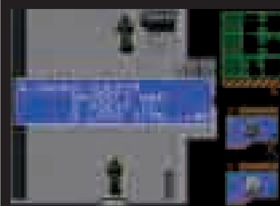
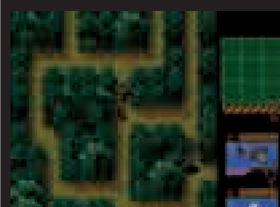
» **SYSTEM:** SUPER FAMICOM, GBA, PSONE

» **GAME RELEASED:** 1995

» **TRANSLATION RELEASED:** 2001

» **TRANSLATION BY:** DEJAP TRANSLATIONS

Prior to the 2001 release, there had been at least two failed attempts at translating this. At the opposite end of the scale to SoM2Freak, peoplained that DeJap takes too many liberties with its translations, *Tales Of Phantasia* included. Regardless, the game is stunning and well worth playing. It's officially the biggest SFC game ever produced, weighing in at a massive 64Mbits! This is due mostly to digitised dialogue and a full vocal song in the intro. In late 2002 another patch was released by Topping Translations, dubbing all voices into English. Work has also begun on the PSOne remake. Its recently had an offcial GBA Western release.

METAL GEAR 2: SOLID SNAKE

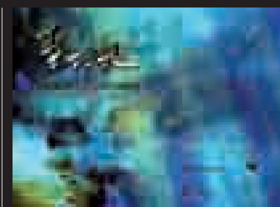
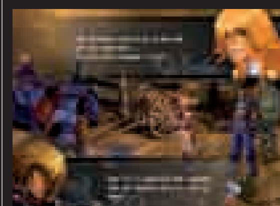
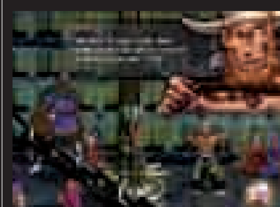
» **SYSTEM:** MSX

» **GAME RELEASED:** 1990

» **TRANSLATION RELEASED:** 1997

» **TRANSLATION BY:** MAARTEN TER HUURNE & TAKAMICHI SUZUKAWA

A magnificent game that was ahead of its time; Konami took 16 years to translate and re-release it (as part of *MGS3*). Holland unofficially did it in seven, highlighting the stark reality of fan-translations. Development time was three months and involved the legendary Takamichi, who is probably one of the best-known translators outside of the Netherlands. He strived for accuracy, researching military terms and even translated the manual! Takamichi sent translated script fragments which Maarten, unable to read Japanese, would label and insert into the ROM. To save data space, he also created a custom language, compiler, and compression algorithm.

HEROINE ANTHEM: THE ELECT OF WASSERNIXIE

» **SYSTEM:** PC

» **GAME RELEASED:** 2002

» **TRANSLATION RELEASED:** EXPECTED 2007

» **TRANSLATION BY:** DERRICK SOBODASH

Some will decry the lack of *FFV* or *DQV*, but for setting precedents we had to mention *Heroine Anthem*. While not strictly 'retro', the exquisite 2D visuals (some of the best around) will appeal to retro fans, as should the unique narrative and gameplay. *Heroine Anthem* is actually a Chinese-language series of RPGs, about a woman drowned at sea and then resurrected, which is being worked on by Derrick Sobodash. One of the first to translate from Chinese, he encourages the community to follow suit and also move beyond the SNES. This first instalment's patch is planned for 2007.

HIGH SCORE

GORF

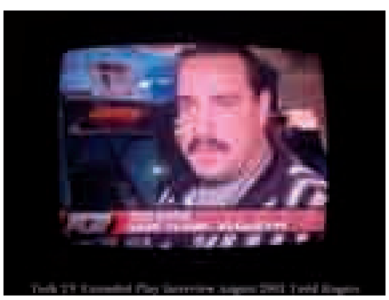
SICK OF BEING GOADED BY A CACKLING ARCADE CABINET? LET GORF CHAMP TODD ROGERS HELP YOU SILENCE THE TAUNT, 'BAD MOVE, SPACE CADET', FOREVER...

First appearing in arcades in 1981, *GORF* made its presence felt by hurling an impressive range of 25 insults and boasts at the player, in an early example of speech synthesis. The game also turned heads by being the first to feature distinct levels and conclude with a Boss level – the Gorfian Flagship.

Programmed by Jamie Fenton, who'd worked on pinball tables for Bally and had headed up the team that developed its home console, the Bally Arcade, the game was also the first to incorporate cut-down versions of other titles. *Space Invaders* and *Galaxian* were both licensed for use within the game; the remaining three stages were formed from the remnants of a stalled *Star Trek* game project, with a hint of *Star Wars* in blowing up the mothership via a well-placed shot into an exhaust port.

And the name? Its origin may have something to do with Jamie's college nickname of 'Frog' and an early Nutting Associates rifle game which had an enemy that hopped in much the same manner as GORF would years later, but trivia buffs will know the acronym actually stands for 'Galactic Orbiting Robot Force.'

For the full story of the game's development, the unreleased *Ms. Gorf* sequel and Jamie's own transition from a mister to a miss see RG 13.



» Todd, as seen on TV… two further documentaries are currently in production



» Todd with his weapon of choice

THE EXPERT

He calls himself 'The King of Videogames'. His prowess on the Atari VCS earned him the title of 'Mr Activision' and he represented his country as part of the US National Videogames Team in the mid-Eighties. He resembles a leaner, less creepy Ron Jeremy and with hundreds of world records to his name, he may indeed have scored more than the aging porn star. Without doubt though, Todd Rogers is a Space Avenger.

"I liked the variety in *GORF*, what with the five different screens," explains Todd, who's high of 653,990 set in 1982 still stands. "Plus I was into weightlifting back then and the trigger controller meant you were flexing your biceps at the same time, which was kind of good for the girls…"

Todd was used to the attention. Having impressed Activision by submitting a quicker time on its title *Dragster* than was thought humanly possible, he was invited to the CES show in Chicago in '82 to showboat his skills. The local boy impressed and was soon earning up to $1000 a day promoting Activision products. It was the first of many such arrangements with games companies and led to Todd playing an array of big name sports stars, including Michael Jordan and George Foreman, to publicise licensed titles.

"I most liked playing Andre the Giant on a wrestling game, as I'd been a long time fan of his, but at that time he was playing a bad guy and so it was kind of hard to talk to him. Plus he spoke French. Bruce Jenner [Gold Medal winner in the decathlon at the 1976 Olympics] didn't like being beaten at his own game much… you see for *Decathlon*, I have this special technique where I hold the joystick between all four fingers, kind of like Spock's 'Live Long and Prosper' sign."

Despite pioneering unusual handgrips, Todd couldn't be persuaded to grasp the shaft of Playboy's Penis Joystick. "They asked me to endorse it but I turned it down. Can you imagine me playing *Decathlon*, waggling it back and forth?"

Whilst Todd's career has encompassed many roles, from tipster in Joystik magazine, to time as a bounty hunter, a bouncer for Pantera and a brief spell as an underwear model, he has always taken playing games seriously. His current role as a senior level referee at Twin Galaxies, with specific responsibility for Atari VCS, Intellivision and GameCube titles, keeps him busy and unofficially he's topped a million on *GORF*, but perhaps his most remarkable achievement is playing *Journey Escape* on the VCS for a staggering 85 hours straight.

"Being diagnosed as an insomniac does help," winks Todd. The biggest challenge with a marathon like that is how do you take a potty break? "I used a Burger King cup that time. Fitting a catheter seemed a bit much.'"

THE KNOWLEDGE

Screen 1: Narrow down the width of the alien group so that they have to travel more of a distance before they drop down and kill you. On the first pass, the Space Invaders travel to the right, so try to pick off the extreme right-hand side of the alien formation row after row. **Screen 2:** Try to shoot one or both of the laser ships first because they can corner you into a position where you cannot escape. If you're playing the original ROM, there is a hiding place on this screen, though you can't use it if you're going for a record. Shoot all the ships except one laser ship and you're safe at the far left hand side of the screen. **Screen 3:** The Galaxians will usually attack to your last position so don't get trapped in a corner and keep moving. In most instances the aliens only shoot three bullets each and cannot fire again till the shots have left the screen, so try to bait the ships into firing at your last position

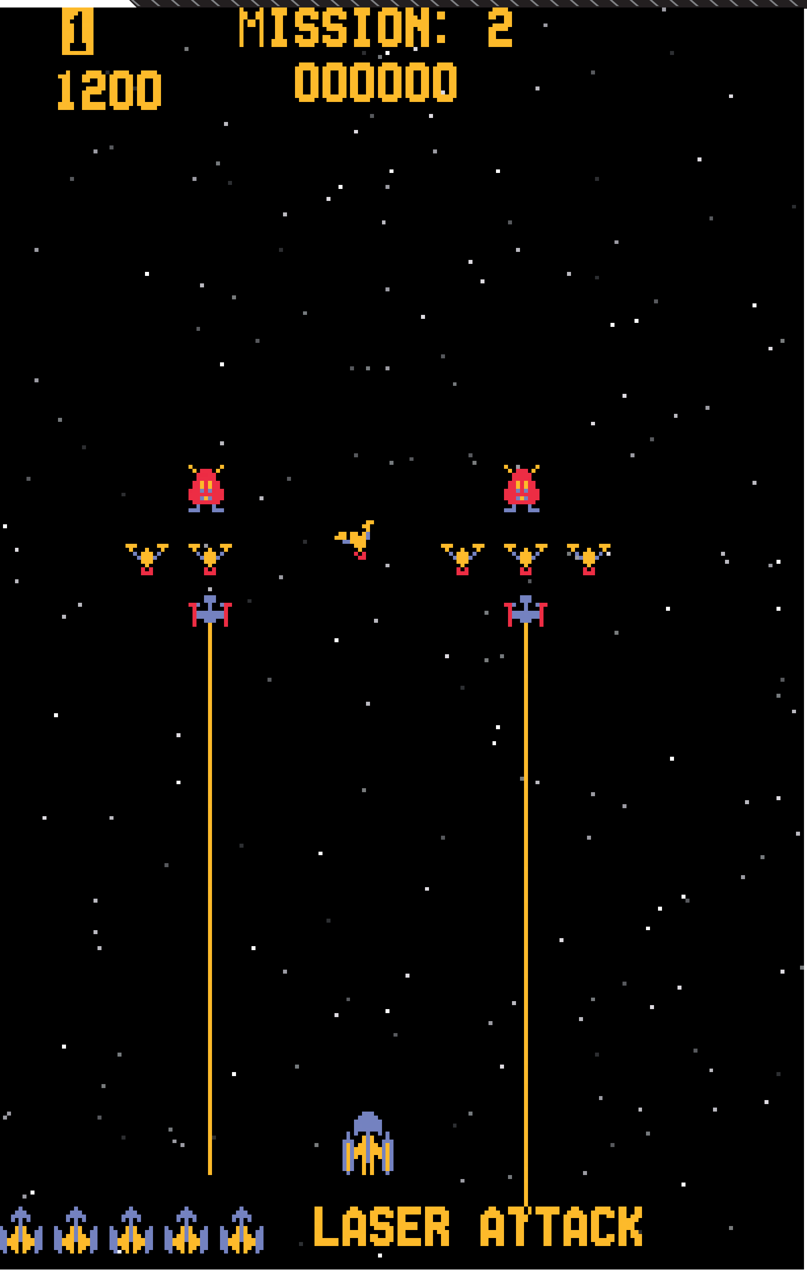
HIGH SCORE NEWS

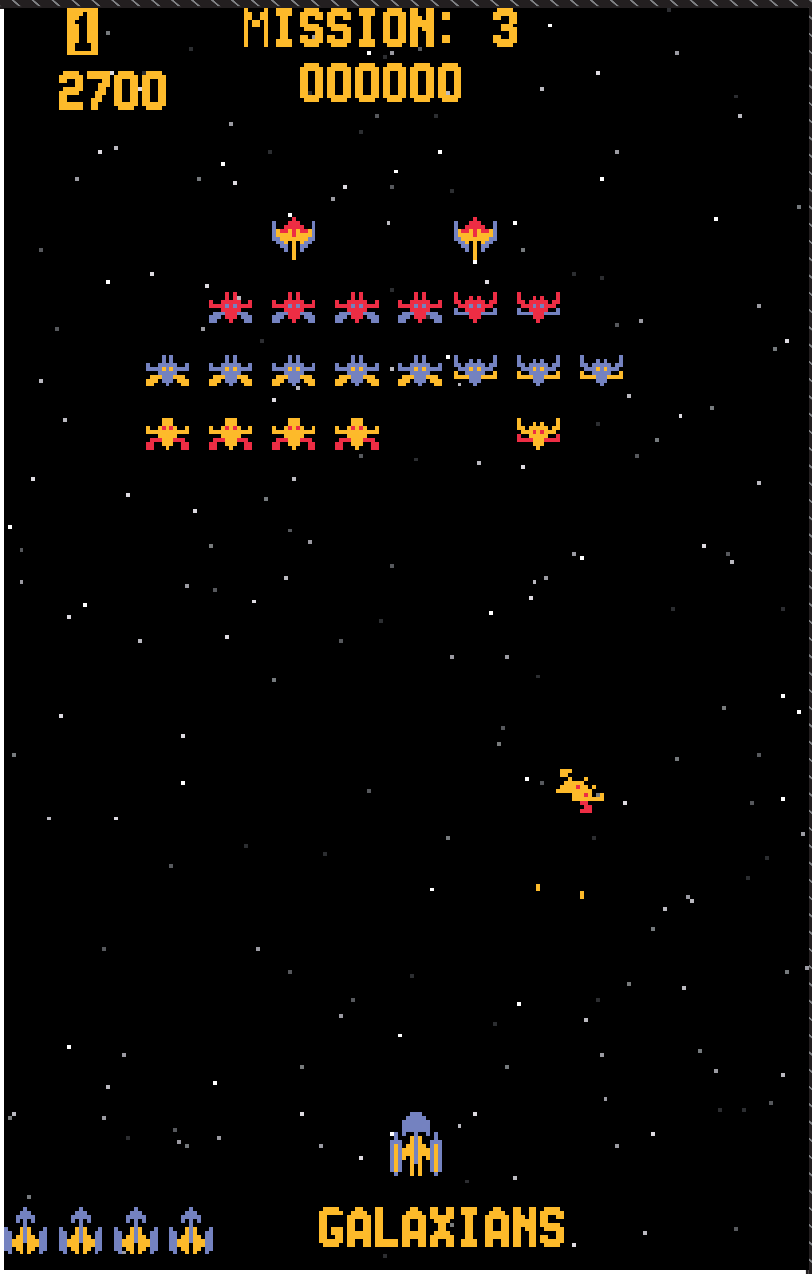
The unstoppable Abdner Ashman added the *Ms. Pac-Man* record to his recently acquired *Robotron* tournament crown at the 'Toughest Gun' event held last month. Brit Gary Whelan also made the journey to Apollo Amusements in Florida to try and better his *Galaxian* score, only to discover on his arrival that the cabinet was bust. 'They couldn't stop apologising and kept giving me loads of food and drink,' explained the sanguine Mancunian. He's heading to Funspot in New Hampshire this June for another attempt, though whether it's for the record or the free booze is a moot point…

For the first time in two decades, the *Guinness Book Of World Records* is to feature videogame High Scores. Twin Galaxies will be providing the information, though which games will be included is as yet unclear. Still, if you're close to a world record on a classic title, now's the time to post your best score and make the ghost of Roy Castle proud of you…



» Todd's been passing on tips since a teenager (featured here in Joystik magazine from 1982)





» If anybody can get even close Todd's top score be sure to let us know…

then moving and shooting them as they descend. **Screen 4:** A skilled player can pick off most of the aliens by shooting them as soon as they appear. Fly your ship as close to the centre of the screen as you can get, but keep an eye out for rogue fireballs, especially as they tend to blend in with the background. **Screen 5:** Two methods here. You can either offset your ship a little to the right and shoot through the shield and then shoot again. The bullet will carry through the opening in the shield and shoot the mother ship in the belly or the very centre of the ship, destroying it. This two shot kill is useful if you want to rush through a game to jump up in rank. Otherwise, you can spend time destroying all of the mothership's protective shield to milk it for points. **General:** Watch out for the 'points' value left behind when you've destroyed an alien – running in to it will kill you. The game increases in difficulty till you become a Space Avenger at Level 26 and then levels off. For marathon games, the constant squeezing of the trigger can lead to cramp and blisters. I recommend strengthening your grip by squeezing a tennis ball and gloves can help.

"I MOST LIKED PLAYING ANDRE THE GIANT ON A WRESTLING GAME, AS I'D BEEN A LONG TIME FAN OF HIS"
TODD ROGERS



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

SONIC TEAM

Developer Lookback: Initially famous for creating *Sonic The Hedgehog*, Sonic Team was behind some of the Mega Drive, Saturn and Dreamcast's best games. Yuji Naka reveals its rich history

SONIC SPECIAL

As Sega's most popular mascot celebrates his 15th birthday, Yuji Naka explains how Sega's mascot has evolved



THE MAKING OF…

The *International Karate* series has had a past that's as hard hitting as the games. Archer Maclean reveals the genesis of his two karate hits



THE MAKING OF…

So, was *Smash TV* just a tired re-hash of *Robotron: 2084*, or another essential arcade hit? Retro Gamer chats to Eugene Jarvis and discovers the truth…



ON SALE 22 JUNE 2006

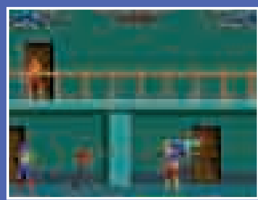
RETROINSPECTION

Atari Jaguar. Atari's Jaguar promised so much, but ultimately delivered very little. Retro Gamer looks back at where it all went wrong



THE HISTORY OF ROLLING THUNDER

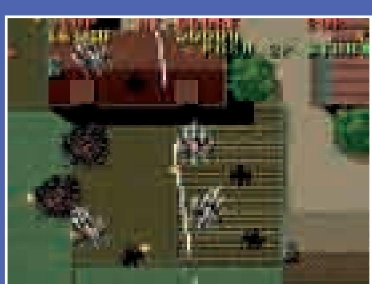
Namco's excellent *Rolling Thunder* is a lot more influential than you might think. Retro Gamer discovers how it helped mould the Run-'N-Gun genre





DEFINITIVE RAIDEN

After bringing you the definitive guide to *Gradius*, Stuart Campbell looks back at another revered shooting franchise – *Raiden*



AND THE REST...

Full of Eastern Promise
Retro Rated
80s A - Z
Back to the 80s
Arcade Inspection
And much, much more

retro GAMER LOAD 26

NEXT ISSUE



DRAGON NINJA

Released in the US and UK with a 'Bad Dudes Vs' attached at the beginning of its name, *Dragon Ninja* is a typical scrolling beat-em-up, albeit one with a healthy side order of charm. After fighting on the backs of moving trucks; wading through stench-infested sewers and fighting off the likes of Karnov, the hero finally reaches the captured president.



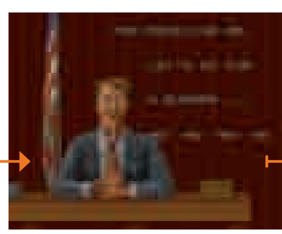
SCREEN 1

Up, up and away. We see what you've done here Data East. You've got us battling the game's toughest boss on the blades of a helicopter. Fighting on a tiny ledge isn't fun at all. Still, at least it's going to hurt when he falls…



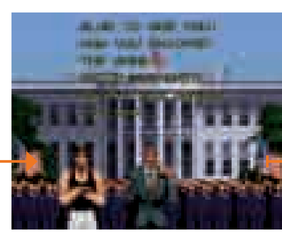
SCREEN 2

We've been jipped! After a tremendous battle our foe simply slumps to the floor and doesn't fall from the helicopter in glorious slo-mo like we were expecting. We want our money back. Like now.



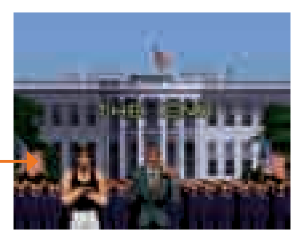
SCREEN 3

The helicopter finally lands and out pops the President of the United States. Peeved you won't be enjoying a traditional kiss as a reward you're soon cheered up with the promise of burgers.



SCREEN 4

With the President safe those cheeky scamps at Data East immediately resort to flogging its next set of arcade games. Where's the impressive end sequence that pushes the hardware to its limits? Oh the humanity…



SCREEN 5

President Ronnie – no guesses to who was in power at the time of *Dragon Ninja*'s release – mugs inanely with his rescuer and wonders when he should tell him that there's no actual burgers as he's left his wallet at home.